

MIKE SHAYNE

MYSTERY MAGAZINE

AUGUST 1980

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The New Mike Shayne

Short Novel

**THE VIPER
CONSPIRACY**

by Brett Halliday

Short Stories by

TERRY BLACK

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SEAN McMARTIN

JAMES M. REASONER

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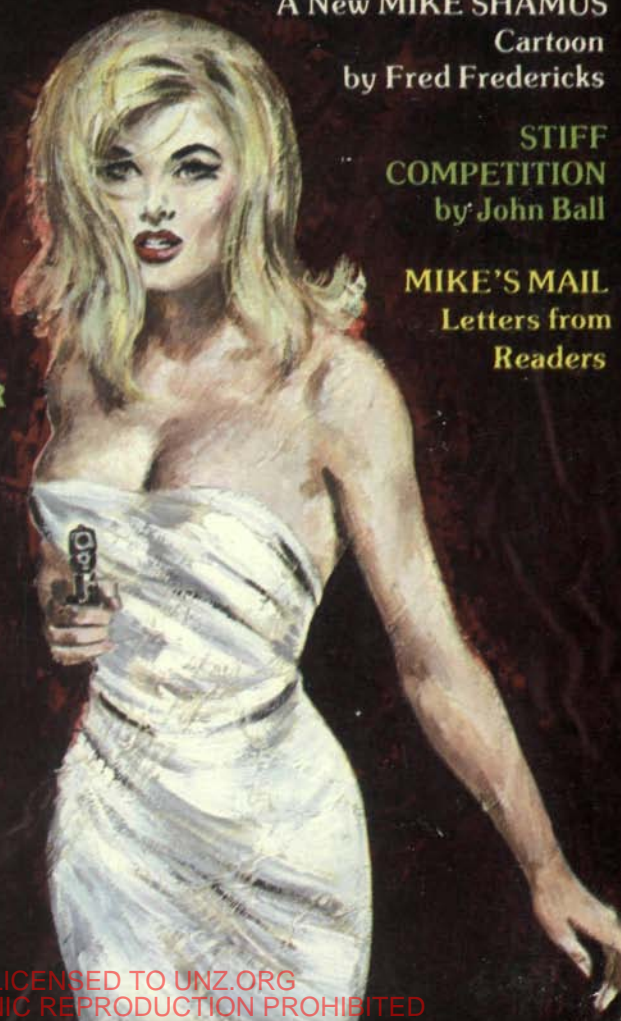
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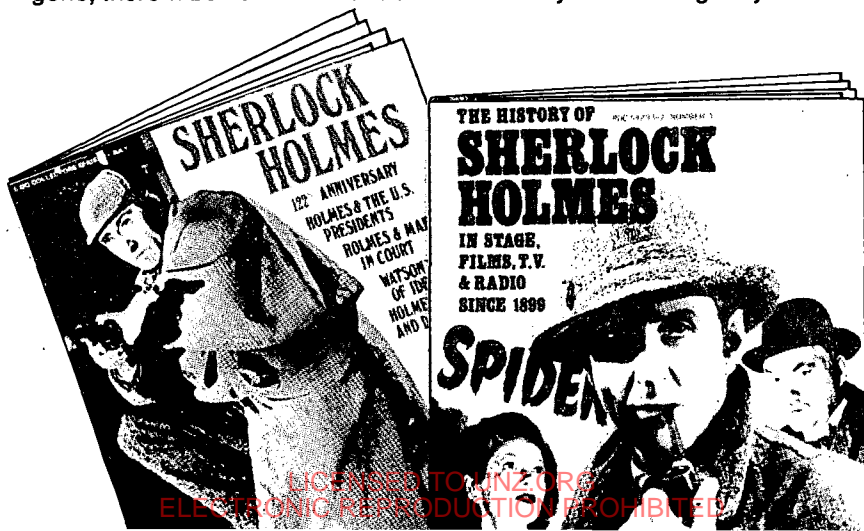
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MIKE SHAYNE

MYSTERY MAGAZINE

THE VIPER CONSPIRACY

by Brett Halliday

Shayne was tired of being followed, lied to, tricked, shot at, almost blown up. From now on he was hitting this case hard and fast — and anyone who got in his way would just have to watch out! 6

SHORT STORIES

THE LAST WORD

James M. Reasoner 55

A BLEND OF MURDER

Dick Stodghill 66

JUST ONE MORE

Edward D. Hoch 75

CONDUCT UNBECOMING

Sean McMartin 79

PATTERNS

Dan J. Marlowe 92

COLD GREEN LIGHT

Moss Tadrack 100

LOONEY TUNE

Terry Black 111

SPECIAL FEATURES

ED NOON'S MINUTE MYSTERIES

Michael Avallone 116

MIKE'S MAIL (letters from Readers)

. 118

MIKE SHAMUS (Cartoon)

Fred Fredericks 125

STIFF COMPETITION (Book Reviews)

John Ball 126

TV DETECTIVES (A Quiz)

. 129

MIKE SHAYNE

Looney Tune is TERRY BLACK's first published story, but it won't be his last. I know this for a fact, because I've already accepted another one written by this talented newcomer. Terry tells us:

I am a 25-year-old computer programmer living in Fullerton, California, transplanted from my native Pittsburgh. I often infuriate my suntanned friends by complaining about the disgustingly tropical weather out here. I've had a number of odd jobs, such as filling potholes, emptying garbage, fishing candy wrappers out of swimming pools, and burying dead fish off the shores of Lake Michigan. I'm currently working on a mystery novel called Bindlestiff, the Gumshoe about a blundering detective with adenoid problems and a gila monster named Fido.

DAN J. MARLOWE is certainly no newcomer to mystery fiction. To his credit, he has more than two dozen books, which have been translated into French, German, Italian, Swedish, Finnish, Norwegian, Japanese, Greek, Dutch and Afrikaans, Spanish, and Portuguese. In addition, he has authored more than 250 short stories and articles for mystery, suspense, adventure, and men's magazines. He is the creator of the Earl Drake series featuring the ex-bankrobber with the remade face, of whom a prison psychiatrist said, "Drake is an extremely functional sociopath driven to correct by any means what he considers to be injustice and cruelty. Characteristic most admired in others: competence."

Patterns in this issue is not about Drake, but in inventory we have the only Drake story that's less than novel length, and the novelette will appear in a forthcoming MSMM. Until then, enjoy *Patterns*, which is about a very unusual female dean of a college and some of her very unusual students.

MYSTERY MAKERS

SEAN McMARTIN's work has been published in a wide variety of places, from men's magazines, through literary quarterlies, to the Saturday Evening Post. His short stories have been selected for the Roll of Honor in the *Best American Short Stories of 1969*; for Distinctive Stories, *Best American Short Stories of 1972*; for the Roll of Honor, *Best American Short Stories of 1976*. When you read his *Conduct Unbecoming* in this issue, you'll see why.

Now that I have your attention, I wanted to tell you about a couple of even-more-interesting-than-usual issues coming up.

Like the next one, September, with the lead novel YESTERDAY'S ANGEL. I suppose all you Mike Shayne fans know that Mike was once married — to Phyllis Brighton, a beautiful black-haired girl who after several adventures died in childbirth. But did she really die? Next month Brett Halliday brings her back — and plunges the redheaded Miami detective into a complex and exciting adventure.

Then in October, there's a special theme issue, CRIMES IN OTHER TIMES, in which all the stories are set in different time periods: 45AD, 1888, 1930, 1942, 1990, etc. The lead novel for this issue, MAYHEM IN MAGIC CITY, fills in the gap in the Shayne-Phyllis chronology, showing the events surrounding Phyllis' death.

You won't want to miss either of these unusual issues.

Meanwhile, (I keep saying this, but it's true!) you've got plenty of good reading in your hands. Enjoy it!

— CEF

THE VIPER

CONSPIRACY

BY
BRETT
HALL-DAY



"MICHAEL, THERE'S A LADY out here I think you'll want to see."

Mike Shayne looked up at his lovely brown-haired, secretary, Lucy Hamilton. A grin creased his lean, rugged face.

"That nice, huh, Angel?" he asked.

She smiled, too. "That *rich*."

Shayne nodded. The office bank account was healthy enough, but contributions were always welcome. He said, "Show her in."

As Lucy returned to the outer office, Shayne swung his chair around and spent a moment looking out the window behind his desk. It was early afternoon in Miami, and the summer sky was dazzlingly bright and clear. Whatever this new job was, Shayne hoped it would get him out of the office for a little while.

Lucy opened the interoffice door again and ushered in a young woman. She said, "Michael, this is Miss Adams. Miss Adams, Michael Shayne."

The young woman came across the room and held out a hand. Shayne shook it as he stood up. The woman said, "Hello, Mr. Shayne. I've heard a great deal about you, and I think you're the man I need to help me."

"I hope so," Shayne said. "Have a seat, and tell me about it."

Lucy retreated into the outer office as Shayne and Miss Adams sat down, but Shayne unob-

trusively flipped the switch on the intercom so that Lucy could listen and take notes. He settled back in his chair and devoted a few seconds to a quick study of this potential client.

Miss Adams was young, no more than twenty-one or twenty-two, with tawny hair and a lithe figure. She wore an expensive-looking outfit and dark glasses, which were reasonable enough considering the brightness of the day outside.

"I'm Hilary Adams, of the Philadelphia Adamses, Mr. Shayne," she said. "It's about my brother that I've come to see you."

Shayne wouldn't know a Philadelphia Adams from any other Adams, but he just nodded slightly and asked, "Is your brother in trouble?"

Hilary Adams stiffened. "What makes you think that?"

Shayne shrugged. "Most of the time when someone consults a private detective, it's about some trouble."

"Oh . . . That's true, I suppose. But I don't know if my brother is in trouble or not. You see, I don't even know where Brad is."

So that was it, a missing person job. He decided to give her the standard warning and get it out of the way.

"I feel like I should tell you, Miss Adams, that if your brother has disappeared, the police can look for him much more efficiently

than I can."

She shook her head. "I — I don't want the police. That would mean publicity."

"Publicity is usually the best way to find a missing person."

"Perhaps I should just tell you some of the background of this matter, Mr. Shayne. Then I'm sure you'll see why I don't want publicity."

"Sounds like a good idea," Shayne agreed.

"We're an old family," she said. "I make no secret of the fact that we have money, but more importantly, we have prestige. Even in this day and age, Philadelphia society can be rather stuffy. I don't want to damage the family's reputation. If this . . . affair were to be plastered all over the front pages, it would just kill my mother and father."

Shayne wished she would stop rambling and get to the heart of the matter, but he kept quiet and let her tell it her way.

"My brother Brad has always been, well, independent. He doesn't care what people think of him or the family. He goes his own way and does what he likes. It's not surprising that he and our father don't get along."

She reached in her purse and brought out cigarettes and a gold lighter. Shayne saw that her hand was shaking just slightly as she lit up. She inhaled deeply, let the smoke trickle from her nostrils, and then seemed to relax a little.

"Things finally came to a head," she went on. "Brad and Father had quite an argument, over . . . over a girl Brad had been seeing, and Brad stormed from the house. That wasn't the first time he had left like that, but he always came back the next morning. This time, though . . . Well, that was over a month ago, and Brad still hasn't come home. I — I'm afraid something may have happened to him."

Shayne leaned forward and clasped his big hands together on the desk. "What makes you think he came to Miami? Have you heard from him at all?"

"Just once. He called one night, when he had been gone for about a week. Luckily, I was the one who answered the phone. If it had been Father, he probably would have hung up. Brad wouldn't tell me where he was, but he did say that he was all right and that I shouldn't worry about him. He said that he was going to live his own life from now on, that he would make his own way without any help from Father."

"You still haven't told me what brought you here."

Hilary took another drag on the cigarette. "Brad reversed the charges when he called. The number he called from was listed on our telephone bill. I looked up the area code. It was Miami's."

"Probably a pay phone," Shayne grunted. "I can find out;

though, if you've still got the number."

She opened her purse again and took out a slip of paper with the number written on it. Shayne took it from her. A call to one of his friends in the phone company offices would give him an address to go with it.

"How did your brother sound when you talked to him?" Shayne asked.

"He sounded tired, but he said he was all right. I wasn't sure I believed him, though. I thought and thought about it, and then I decided to come down here and see if I could find him. I was told that you were the man to see about any delicate matters."

"Have you a picture of your brother?"

Hilary went back into her purse and then handed him a photograph. It was a snapshot, taken outside somewhere, of a young man who was grinning into the camera. He had dark hair, worn relatively short, which the wind had ruffled, and was wearing a sports shirt. One hand was upraised, the fist clenched in some sort of salute.

Shayne put the photo on the desk. "Mind if I keep this for a while?"

"No. I knew you'd need a picture of him. Does this mean you'll take the case, Mr. Shayne?"

Shayne nodded. "I think I'll be able to find your brother for you, Miss Adams, if he's still

around here. You have to realize, though, that he's had time to go clear across the country by now."

"Yes, I — I know. But somehow, I feel like he's still here in Miami."

"Give me a few minutes to check on this number," Shayne said.

He called his contact at the phone company, read off the number, and was told to hang on for a minute while the number was checked out. It was less than a minute, though, before the man on the other end came back and gave Shayne an address. Shayne jotted it down, expressed his gratitude, and hung up.

The beginnings of a frown showed up on his forehead. His hand came up to tug gently at his earlobe. Hilary Adams asked, "What is it, Mr. Shayne? What did you find out?"

"It wasn't a pay phone, after all," Shayne declared. "It's a residential number, and this is the address it belongs to."

Hilary's face brightened. "Why, that's good, isn't it? You can go out there and you might even find Brad. That would be wonderful. This is a good lead, isn't it?"

"A damned good one. but this neighborhood isn't very good, Miss Adams. In fact, it's kind of a rough place. Not the sort of place you'd expect to find a rich fugitive from Philadelphia society," he said bluntly.

A look of anxiety crossed Hilary's face. "I'm afraid that would be just like Brad, Mr. Shayne. He's renounced the family wealth, and I'm sure he would feel like he was making a symbolic gesture by living in a poor neighborhood. Will you go out there right away and follow up on this?"

"All right," Shayne nodded. "There's the matter of a retainer..."

Hilary Adams opened her purse one more time and took out several bills. She counted out ten of them on the desk. Shayne saw two zeros on each of them.

"I know it's only a thousand," Hilary said, "but I can get however much you like. Money is really no object, Mr. Shayne."

Shayne swept the bills up and said, "This will do nicely. It may take me an hour or so to wrap things up, if your brother is still at this address. Where are you staying?"

She named one of the luxury hotels across the Bay in Miami Beach.

There was one more thing Shayne wanted to make clear before she left. "Your brother left home voluntarily, Miss Adams," he said. "If I find him, and if he wants to come, I'll bring him to you. But I have no legal grounds to force him to meet with you."

"I think he'll come with you, Mr. Shayne. We've always been very close. Just tell him that

Hilary wants to see him."

"All right," Shayne nodded.

Hilary Adams gave him a wan smile and another brief handshake, and left the office. He escorted her to the door, and when it was closed, he turned back to see Lucy putting the finishing touches on the notes she had taken.

Shayne perched a hip on the corner of her desk and said, "What do you think, Angel?"

Lucy's brown eyes looked up at him. "Routine missing persons case," she said. "And an easy thousand dollars. There's just one thing, Michael..."

"What's that?"

"How much of what she told you do you think was true?"

Shayne's hearty laugh boomed out, "Angel, you're almost as suspicious as some cops I know. What makes you think she wasn't telling the truth?"

Her smooth brow creased in concentration. "I'm not sure, Michael. Her story just didn't ring true to me. I'm sure she's looking for her brother, but all that business about being from high society..."

Shayne ran a thumb along his jawline. "You know, I think I agree with you about that. She was putting on a good show, but she didn't really strike me as being the type."

Lucy leaned forward. "I don't think she's nearly as rich as she makes out. I think she's scraped

together some money to look for her brother, and she's gambling it all on you."

"Well, I'd better not let her down then, had I?" Shayne leaned over, cupped her chin in one of his big hands, and tilted her head up. Their lips met for a moment, then Shayne straightened and grabbed his hat off the rack. He settled it jauntily on his coarse red hair and said, "I'll get to work on earning that easy thousand dollars."

II

THERE WEREN'T MANY neighborhoods in Miami with which Shayne wasn't familiar, but this time it took him quite a while to locate the address he had been given. The street was one of many in what seemed like a rabbit's warren, and once he found it, the numbering system on the houses seemed to be totally lacking in logic. It was an area of older houses, most of which had been built to accommodate one family and had been divided up in the years following until now each house might have up to five or six families living there. It was a rundown neighborhood, and the people who lived here were a mixture of white, black, and brown, young and old, with only their lack of money to serve as a common bond. The crime rate, quite naturally, was high.

Shayne drove down the street past weed-grown yards and cracked sidewalks, scanning the houses for the number he was seeking. He finally found it on an old three-story frame structure. A leaning picket fence surrounded the yard. Shayne pulled his Buick over to the curb.

He hadn't seen many people on the streets, and he thought the car would be safe enough while he paid a visit to the house. Opening the gate in the fence carefully so that it wouldn't collapse, Shayne strode up the walk to the front porch.

A porch glider with peeling paint hung in front of a grimy picture window. Under the glider was a battered, naked doll, its head twisted askew. Shayne frowned. The Miami sun was as bright as ever, but something about this place made him think of shadows and dankness. He rapped his knuckles sharply on the door facing.

There was no answer, so he knocked again. This time, he heard some faint stirrings inside. A moment later, the door swung open.

"Yeah?" a girl inside said listlessly. "What do you want?"

She wore cutoffs and a halter on her skinny body. Her hair hung in lank strands, and her voice sounded like she wasn't the least bit interested in what Shayne wanted.

"I'm looking for Brad Adams,"

Shayne said. "Do you know him?"

She shook her head, said, "Nope," and started to close the door.

Shayne pulled out the photograph quickly and held it out where she could see it. "This is a picture of him," he said. "Do you recognize him?"

It took a moment for her eyes to focus on the picture, but then she said, "Hey, yeah, I know that guy. So long."

"Wait a minute," Shayne said. He pulled the screen open and placed a palm against the inside door. "Is he here now?"

"No, man, he's not here. But don't stand in the door. Either bust on in or get lost."

Shayne leaned his weight on the door and pushed it back. The girl didn't resist. Shayne stepped into the dim interior of the house, leaving the door open behind him.

"Do you know where I could find the man in the picture?" he asked.

The girl walked slowly across the room, placing her feet carefully as if she was walking along a high ledge. She reached a threadbare sofa, turned around to face Shayne again, and sank down on it, crossing her thin legs under her.

"He crashed here for a while, then moved on to somewhere else," she said. "That's all I know." She looked around the room, then brought her eyes back

to Shayne and looked at him like she was seeing him for the first time. "Who are you?"

Shayne's mouth was a grim line. This girl was obviously flying high on something, and he wasn't just about to trust the answers she had given him. He said, "Do you mind if I look around?"

She shrugged, and he could see the bones in her shoulders. "Help yourself."

There was a hall leading out of the living room, and on a little table on one wall was a telephone. Shayne checked the number on it, and it matched the one Hilary Adams had given him. Brad Adams had made his call from this phone, all right, but that didn't mean that he was still here. It didn't mean he wasn't though.

Shayne went on down the hall and found a kitchen, bathroom, and bedroom at the rear of the house. He heard voices coming from the backyard, and he stepped to the rear door leading out of the kitchen.

Three men in their twenties, all with beards and long hair, were grouped around the open hood of an old van. One of them was tinkering with the engine while the other two watched. Shayne stepped out the door and cleared his throat.

The three bearded faces turned toward him. His gray eyes searched them intently for a few seconds, and then he was convinced that Brad Adams was not

among them.

The one who had been working on the van was husky, almost as large as Shayne, and the other two weren't much smaller. Shayne said, "I'm looking for Brad Adams. Know where I can find him?"

The largest of the trio stepped forward. In one hand was the heavy wrench with which he had been working on the engine. He glared and said, "I don't know any Brad Adams, man. Who the hell are you?"

"My name's Shayne. I've got a picture of Adams here, if you wouldn't mind looking at it."

The other two stepped up to flank the one with the wrench.

He said, "Maybe I do mind. We're busy here. How'd you get back here anyway?"

"I came through the house. The girl in there said Brad Adams used to live here."

The man with the wrench snorted. "You can't go by what Shelley said, man. Her brain's burned out. She's still nice to have around, though. Can't say the same for you. Beat it."

Shayne took the picture from his pocket anyway and stepped forward with it. The three young men tensed, and Shayne saw the one in the middle shift his grip on the wrench.

"I'm not out for trouble," Shayne said slowly. "If you'll take a look at the picture and tell me if you recognize the man, I can

be on my way a lot quicker."

One of the other young men was starting to look nervous. He darted a glance at the picture, then blurted. "We don't know nothin' about what he had with him when he got here. We didn't give him nothin' but a place to sleep —"

The one with the wrench cut him off. "Shut up, Jackie! You don't have to tell this clown anything. Let him go hassle somebody else."

Shayne turned his hard gaze on the one who had spoken up, saying, "Tell me where he went, Jackie. Then I'll leave you alone."

Jackie started to say something else, but the one with the wrench planted a hand on his chest and shoved him backwards, then spun back to face Shayne and snapped, "I told you to get out of here! You want to stick your nose in somebody else's business, you better have a warrant next time!"

Shayne had known right away that they suspected him of being a cop. The girl in the house was obviously an addict, and her companions would be understandably a little paranoid. Taking advantage of their mistaken notion, he growled, "How do you know I don't have a warrant?"

"If you've got it, show it, man."

If the one called Jackie had been alone, Shayne had little doubt that he could have gotten the young man to tell him what he

wanted to know. But this other hard-faced young tough wasn't that easy. Running a simple bluff wouldn't work with him, nor with the other one, who had so far been silent.

Shayne had the feeling that Brad Adams was no longer here, though he most surely had been. He said, "All right. But I know he was here, and I'll remember that you didn't cooperate."

He spun on his heel and started to stalk back toward the house. Since his back was to the three men, he let a tight grin play over his mouth. If Brad Adams was really a refugee from high society, he had picked a good place to hide. And it looked like that thousand might not be so easy to earn. Brad might have only stopped here for a few days, then moved on to God knows where.

Shayne opened the kitchen door and stepped back into the house, intending to go straight through and out to his car. He realized as he passed a staircase that he hadn't checked out the upper floors yet. It was possible that Brad was still here, and that the others were covering for him. Those upstairs rooms needed checking, and since the girl was nowhere in sight, he took the stairs two at a time, moving quickly but quietly.

Most of the doors were open on the second floor, and they led into dirty, cluttered bedrooms. Shayne saw two more men and another

girl sleeping so soundly that the slumber was probably drug-induced. The other rooms were empty.

His long legs carried him up the third floor. The doors up here were open, too, but all he found were two children playing with toy cars. They looked up at him as he paused in the doorway, their small faces solemn. They didn't say a word, as if they were used to strangers wandering around the house. Their clothes were ragged and their faces dirty, and Shayne realized that there was a bad taste in his mouth. There was no telling which of the people in the house they belonged to, if indeed any of them were the parents. He nodded to the two children and then turned toward the only closed door on the floor, the one at the end of the hall.

He tried the knob, felt it turn easily under his fingers, and opened the door. A harsh scream greeted him.

The girl from downstairs, Shelley, was inside the room. Her hands were holding a hypodermic needle and other paraphernalia. She cried out, "Help! Help you guys!"

A bitter curse ripped from Shayne. She didn't remember him, and caught in the act of shooting up, she must have assumed that he was a cop, come to bust her. He slammed the door on her and headed for the stairs.

He made it to the second floor

and was swinging around to take the flight down to the first floor when the three men from the backyard appeared at the bottom of the steps. The one with the wrench still held the tool, and he cried out, "You bastard! You've got no right —"

He broke off and came up the stairs at a run, swinging the heavy wrench back behind his head in readiness to strike. Shayne set his feet and waited for him.

The man lashed out with the wrench, aiming the blow for Shayne's face. Shayne leaned back, letting the wrench whistle past in front of him, then braced himself on the bannister and kicked out. His big foot thudded into the man's chest, throwing him backwards. The man's feet went out from under him, and in a split-second, he was hurtling back down the stairs to crash into his two companions. All of them went sprawling at the foot of the stairs.

Shayne took the stairs three at a time going down, leaping over the fallen trio when he reached the bottom. They were trying to struggle back to their feet when Shayne slipped his pistol out of its shoulder holster and leveled it at them.

"Hold it!" he grated. "I came to this rathole to ask some simple questions, and if you stupid fools had answered them, I'd be long gone by now. Now you're going to answer them, whether you want to

or not! Where's Brad Adams?"

The man Shayne had kicked was sitting up, holding his chest and gasping. "I think you broke something!" he howled.

"I will for sure if I don't get answers."

The wrench had gone spinning away during the melee. Weaponless and hurting, the man had lost all of his belligerence. He said, "Like Jackie told you, this guy showed up a few weeks ago needing a place to stay. He had some good hash, so we let him crash in one of the spare rooms. But then he left a few days later, man, honest! I haven't seen him since."

He was too shook up to be telling anything but the truth, Shayne decided. He nodded grimly and said, "All right. That's all I wanted to know. You don't have any idea where he went?"

"Not a clue, man."

Shayne backed toward the front door, keeping his gun out. The three at the foot of the stairs looked baffled. Jackie said in an incredulous voice, "You ain't gonna bust us?"

"Not today," Shayne said slowly. "But I'll be back. And if those kids upstairs aren't cleaned up, with some better clothes and some better meals in their bellies, I'll make being busted look like a picnic. You understand?"

They all nodded, and Shayne backed on out of the house,

keeping his gun in his hand until he was in his Buick and rolling out of the neighborhood.

It wasn't until a traffic cop stopped him a few blocks from his office that he realized someone had ripped off his license plates.

Yeah, this job was going to be a real piece of cake, all right.

III

BACK AT THE OFFICE, Shayne and Lucy spent a little over an hour checking all the places that have to be checked on every missing persons case. They made calls to all the hospitals and clinics in the Miami area, seeking a patient who matched Brad Adam's description. The calls turned up nothing, and a check at the morgue came up with the same results. Shayne put out the word with some of his street contacts, giving Brad's name and description, and by the time all of that had been done, Shayne was weary of talking on the phone.

He went into the outer office and found Lucy on the other line, wrapping up her list of hospitals to call, still with no luck. He had told her about what had happened at the old house, and she shared his sympathy for children who were forced to live in such a situation.

It was nearly five o'clock. Lucy covered her typewriter as Shayne leaned a hip on her desk. He said, "I don't think we're

going to do any good today on this case, Angel. How about some dinner?"

She looked slightly embarrassed as she took her purse out of the desk. "I'm afraid I can't, Michael," she said. "I've got a date tonight."

One of Shayne's bushy red brows went up. He said, "Oh? Have fun, then. I guess I'll make an early night of it."

They traded smiles and then Lucy went out. Shayne watched her close the door behind her, and a frown settled over his face. There wasn't a damn thing wrong with her going out with another man now and then, but . . .

"Damned if you aren't jealous," he said out loud, and then he couldn't stop a laugh from coming. The understanding he had with Lucy was comfortable and fulfilling for both of them, and he wasn't just about to start worrying about it.

He locked up the office and headed for his apartment, intent on fixing himself a thick steak with all the trimmings. What he would do after that was still up in the air. Perhaps a phone call to Miami's Police Chief, Will Gentry, to let him know about the case . . . Bull sessions with Gentry were often helpful to Shayne's thought processes.

Shayne left his car in the basement garage of his apartment hotel and rode upstairs in the elevator, bypassing the lobby.

He could feel his stomach rumbling with hunger as he strode down the hall toward his door.

Keying it open, he stepped inside and swung the door shut behind him. The early evening glow coming in through the windows provided enough illumination that he didn't need the overhead lights yet.

He scaled his hat onto the sofa and then paused beside the liquor cabinet to build himself a drink. He poured out a tumbler of Martell and sipped at it, looking down at the cabinet . . .

Something was wrong. He pulled at his ear without thinking about it as he concentrated on the liquor cabinet. The door had been open just slightly, not hardly enough to notice, but he always shut it completely. Someone had opened it and then shut it again, only it hadn't quite caught.

Shayne straightened up, his nerves suddenly taut and his senses straining for the slightest sound. If someone had been in here, they might still be around.

He set the tumbler of Martell down and wheeled slowly toward the bedroom door. It was closed, as he usually left it. The sun was a little lower now, and shadows were starting to creep into the apartment. There had been no sounds other than the faint street noises filtering up from below.

Shayne walked across the room, moving with uncanny silence for

a man of his size. His hand stole inside his coat and slipped his gun out of its holster. Reaching down, he wrapped his fingers around the doorknob and turned it as if nothing were wrong. But instead of opening it and strolling into the bedroom as he normally did, he flung the door open and launched himself into a dive that carried him into the room.

Landing on the carpeted floor, he rolled, bringing the gun up and flicking it from side to side to cover the room.

There was nothing.

Shayne came to his feet and checked out the place quickly. If the cabinet door hadn't made him suspicious, he might have missed all the other signs — the items in the bathroom just slightly out of their usual alignment, the bedspread rumpled in the wrong places — the kind of things whose wrongness registered almost below the level of consciousness.

There was no doubt about it, though. The apartment was empty now, but someone had been there and searched it, very thoroughly, very carefully, and very professionally.

Shayne picked up the cognac again and sat down to consider. The Adams case was all he was working on at the moment, and he couldn't see any reason why it would prompt such a search of his apartment. Unless there was something important that Hilary Adams had not told him.

Maybe it was time he had another talk with Miss Adams of Philadelphia.

He went to the telephone and rapidly dialed the number of the hotel where Hilary had told him she was staying. He asked for Miss Adams, and the switchboard put the call right through. A few seconds later, he heard Hilary saying, "Hello?"

"Miss Adams?"

"Yes. Who is this?"

"Mike Shayne. I checked out that address where your brother called from."

There was a quick intake of breath on the other end of the line. Hilary said, "Did you find him?"

"I'm afraid not. He had been there, all right, but he's not there now. I was wondering . . . Could I tell you about it over dinner?"

A moment of silence followed his question, as if it had taken her by surprise. Then she said, "I suppose so, if you like. Should I meet you somewhere?"

"They have a good restaurant right there, in the hotel. Why don't we meet there in, say an hour?"

"All right." Hilary sounded puzzled, but her desire to hear about her brother must have overcome her bafflement. "That's fine. I'll be there."

"So will I," Shayne said, and hung up.

He finished off his drink and then went into the bathroom for a quick shave and shower. He tried to blank his mind as the red-hot

needles of spray pounded him, and he felt rested and refreshed as he emerged.

Night had fallen by the time Shayne reached the hotel and strolled into the restaurant on the first floor. He was a few minutes early, but Hilary was already there, sitting at a small table tucked into a corner.

Shayne joined her, nodded in greeting, and said, "Hello again. I hope I didn't spoil any of your plans when I asked to meet with you."

Hilary smiled weakly. "No, not at all. I don't really have any plans, except to find Brad."

"That may turn out to be a little harder than I thought it would be."

She frowned and leaned forward. "What is it? What's happened, Mr. Shayne?"

The arrival of a waiter bearing ostentatious menus kept Shayne from answering right away. Wanting to get the business of ordering out of the way, Hilary decided on a steak only, while Shayne opted for that thick steak with all the trimmings that he had planned on fixing for himself.

When the waiter had gone, Hilary asked again, "What happened when you went out to that house?"

"There were quite a few people there," Shayne said, "but none of them were Brad. I had to do a little convincing, but the ones that were there finally told me that Brad

showed up there a few weeks ago, looking for a place to stay. He had some drugs with him, so they let him sleep there a couple of nights, but then he left. They didn't have any ideas where he went."

He had been watching Hilary's eyes closely when he mentioned drugs, and there was no surprise in them. She had known that he used drugs, then. The information might not be particularly relevant to the case, but Shayne liked knowing as much as he could about the people involved in any of his investigations.

"What will you do now?" Hilary asked. "Do you have any other leads?"

"Not yet," Shayne admitted. "We've done all the routine work, checking with the hospitals and such. No sign of Brad has turned up anywhere. I've got the word out on the street, too. Maybe something will turn up."

Strain etched anxious lines in Hilary's face. "Then you really aren't any closer to Brad than you started this afternoon?"

"I'm afraid not. I told you, though, he's had time to get to almost anywhere since you talked to him. It may take some time to locate him, but —"

Hilary's hands clenched into fists as she stared down at the table. "You don't understand!" she said suddenly. "I don't have time —"

She broke off abruptly, closed her eyes for a second, then opened

them and looked up at Shayne. "Excuse me," she said, with a wan smile. "I'm just worried about Brad. We've always been closer than most brothers and sisters. I . . . I understand that it's not an easy job, though."

Shayne nodded and said reassuringly, "Don't worry. We'll find Brad, and I'm sure he'll be all right."

He wasn't a bit sure, but he wasn't going to tell Hilary that, at least not yet. She was obviously overwrought, and if he voiced all his doubts about this case, she might become so upset that he wouldn't be able to get any information out of her at all.

Their food arrived a moment later, and the conversation halted briefly as they began their meal. Shayne dug in, enjoying the steak. When a few minutes had gone by, however, he went back to work.

"Do you know if Brad has any friends in this area?" he asked.

"None that I know of. Of course, I might not know all of his friends. He has to be staying somewhere."

"That's true," Shayne said. "Do you know of anything he's always wanted to do but hasn't up to now? Some place he wanted to visit, maybe?"

"No. We've been able to do nearly everything we wanted, thanks to, well, to the family's money."

Shayne considered what she had said. She evidently did have

plenty of money, despite the possibilities that he and Lucy had talked over, or she wouldn't have been able to stay at this hotel. Maybe she was telling the truth all the way around.

But if she was, that still didn't explain why someone would search his apartment.

He decided to probe a little more into her background. Casually, he asked, "Just what is it your father does?"

"Does? You mean for a living?"

"Yeah. Or is the wealth inherited?"

She nodded. "Yes, it's inherited. From my . . . from my grandfather. He was in real estate, a self-made man, I suppose you could say."

Shayne nodded, sipping his drink, not letting her see that he didn't believe a word of her last statement.

His work as a private detective had taken him into high circles as well as low, and he knew that in the world of society, money and status went together. But he also knew that old money carried much more weight than new money, and he figured that the Adamses couldn't possibly have attained the prominence that Hilary claimed the family had if their wealth was only two generations old.

Shayne kept those thoughts to himself, though, as he continued asking Hilary general questions about Philadelphia. It had been a

long time since he had been there, so he couldn't have vouched for the accuracy of her answers, but her slight hesitations before she answered some of the questions told him that she was nervous and uncertain about them. She was trying to keep up a pose of self-assurance, but he had questioned enough people over the years to be able to spot someone who was lying.

And Hilary Adams, if that was really her name, was lying through her pretty white teeth.

She didn't show any signs of breaking down and telling him the truth, though, and Shayne decided not to try to force it out of her for the time being. This case might wind up being a lot more than a simple missing persons job, as he had thought in the beginning, and until all the unknown elements were cleared up, he would proceed with his eyes wide open and his gun close at hand.

When they had finished off the excellent meal, Hilary said, "Thank you for telling me what you've found out so far, Mr. Shayne."

"It's not much," Shayne said.

"Perhaps not, but at least I know now that Brad was all right when he was here, and that he left that place on his own. That's more than I knew earlier. I'm sure you'll find him. I'll be waiting here at the hotel when you do."

She stood up, and Shayne stood, too. He said, "I'll be in

touch. I'll let you know right away if I hear anything, or if I locate Brad."

Hilary held out her hand to him. Shayne shook it. The hand was cold, despite the warmth of the night.

"Good night, Mr. Shayne."

"Good night." Shayne watched her for a moment as she walked out of the restaurant. He dropped a bill on the table to cover the check and the tip, then headed out of the place himself.

His path took him through the hotel lobby, past a bank of telephone booths. Pausing, he decided to give in to an impulse that was playing around in his mind. He entered one of the booths and called a familiar number. After several rings, the phone on the other end was picked up and an impatient voice said, "Yeah?"

"It's me, Tim," Shayne said. "I need a favor."

Tim Rourke was the top reporter for the Miami *Daily News*, a journalist who was an investigative reporter long before it became fashionable, and Shayne's oldest and best friend, as well as a dependable source of information. Now he growled, "I'm racing a deadline, Mike. Make it fast."

"Will do. I need the name and number of a society reporter in Philadelphia."

"In Philly?" What the hell's up? You on a case?"

"Maybe. I'll give you a run-

down when there is one, you know that."

"Yeah, sure. Wait a minute; I'll look in my book and see what I can find." Rourke put the phone down, and Shayne could hear the noisy chatter of the City Room in the background. Less than a minute later, Rourke was back on the line, saying, "Here it is. Leslie Bennett, been covering Main Line society for years, and she has great legs besides. It still beats me what you could be mixed up in that would involve Philadelphia high society."

"It probably doesn't," Shayne said. "How about the number?"

Rourke read it off, then said, "That's her number at the paper. I don't have her home phone, but I've been trying to get it at every journalism convention we're both at."

Shayne grinned. "That's good enough. You'd better get back to your deadline and stop thinking about Leslie Bennett's legs."

"Ah, Leslie's legs . . . I suppose you're right, Mike. So long."

"So long, Tim. And thanks."

He broke the connection and then placed the long-distance call to Philadelphia. Leslie Bennett was not at the newspaper offices, but Shayne did turn up a night editor who knew Rourke and who agreed to give him the society reporter's home number. As Shayne dialed again, a wry grin creased his face. His efforts at getting Leslie's home number had

been a lot more successful than Tim's.

A woman with a soft voice answered the phone, and Shayne asked, "Is this Leslie Bennett?"

"Yes, it is. Who's this?"

"My name is Mike Shayne, Miss Bennett. I'm calling from Miami. I'm a private detective, and a friend of Tim Rourke's."

"Oh, I see." Amusement came through in her voice. "Is Tim so desperate for me that he hired a private eye to track me down?"

Shayne chuckled. "He did sound like he, ah, admired you. But that's not the reason I'm calling. I thought maybe you could help me with a case I'm working on."

There was a slight pause, then Leslie said, "I'm sorry, Mr. Shayne, but I cover society, not the crime beat."

"That's just what I want. Is there a prominent family named Adams up there?"

"More than one. Adams is an old, respected name in this part of the country, Mr. Shayne, dating from the times of the American Revolution. Do you have some first names?"

"Two. Hilary and Brad. They're brother and sister. Does that ring any bells?"

Again there was a brief pause as Leslie Bennett considered. Then she said, "I don't think so. I have to keep up with all the Main Line families, and I don't know of any Hilary or Brad Adams."

"I thought so," Shayne muttered to himself.

"I'm sorry I wasn't any help, Mr. Shayne —"

"I didn't say that. You've been very helpful. I appreciate you taking the time to talk to me."

"Mr. Shayne?"

"Yeah?"

"How's Tim?" —

Shayne chuckled. "Same as ever. I think he's looking forward to the next convention that both of you attend. He must have some new strategy mapped out."

"Maybe he'll be more successful this time."

"I'll tell him you said that."

"Don't you dare!"

Shayne assured her that he wouldn't, thanked her again, and hung up. Emerging from the booth, he looked around the lobby and considered what his next move should be.

Now that he knew for sure Hilary had been lying to him, part of him wanted to march upstairs and demand that she tell him the truth. Another part of him said to hold off on that, though, to give him a chance to dig out the facts on his own. He had a feeling that if he found Brad Adams, he would have all the answers he needed. The less impulsive side of him won this round; he would carry on with the investigation for a while before he confronted Hilary with his suspicions.

He retrieved his Buick from the hotel parking lot and headed back

across the Bay toward his apartment. He wondered idly for a moment if Lucy was back from her date yet, then dismissed the thought.

He speculated, instead, on why Hilary had been lying to him. She hadn't wanted the police involved, she had admitted that much freely, which led Shayne to suspect that maybe she was involved in something illegal. She might think she was playing him for a sucker, getting him to do her dirty work, but she would find out different.

It would be very interesting to see what kind of story Brad Adams told when he was finally found.

Shayne kept a close eye on the rearview mirror as he drove. Knowing that his apartment had been searched earlier, he was very aware of the fact that someone might be following him as well. As he drove over one of the causeways spanning Biscayne Bay, he noticed a pair of headlights that seemed to be maintaining a fairly steady interval behind him.

Shayne took the long way to his apartment, making several turns and altering his speed up and down. The headlights behind him made the first two turns right along with him, then dropped out of sight. A few blocks later, another pair of lights that could have been the same ones popped up again. They stayed with the Buick for a few blocks, then they disappeared, too.

A grim smile played over Shayne's face. If he was being followed, it was by someone who was damn good at his job. Whoever it was that had searched his apartment had been good, too, good enough not to leave any marks on the lock and good enough that only a very slight mistake had tipped their hand. The mysterious figures who seemed to be taking an interest in this case were pros, all right, and Shayne would just have to be that much more careful.

By the time he reached his apartment, the followers, if such they were, had vanished. He parked the car, rode up in the elevator, and pulled his gun before he opened his door. No point in taking chances. That was a lesson Shayne had learned well over the years.

He unlocked the door, swung it open, and stepped quickly to one side, in case someone was waiting inside to blast him as he came in. Nothing happened, though, and after thirty long seconds had ticked by, Shayne moved quickly into the apartment. His left hand reached out and flipped the light switch.

Nothing.

Shayne cursed and wheeled, ready to dive back out into the hall. Someone slammed the door before he could reach it, and his big frame bounced off the solid portal. Hands were groping at him out of the darkness.

He cursed again, lashing out with the pistol in his hand. It didn't connect with anything but air, and then something hit the back of his knees. Shayne felt himself going down.

So far none of his attackers had spoken, but he could hear harsh breathing from at least three sets of lungs. He hit the floor hard, but he kept the grip on his gun and went into a roll across the floor. Bumping into trouser-clad legs, he struck out with the gun again.

This time it found a target. Someone let out a howl and collapsed on top of Shayne. The big redhead pushed him off, rolled again, and came to his feet in a crouch.

Another one landed on his back then. Shayne went to his knees as an arm looped around his throat and tightened, cutting off his air. He drove an elbow back, felt it sink into a stomach, and then the grip on him came loose. His foe gasped, "Dammit, I can't hold him!"

The voice wasn't familiar. Shayne wished for some light. He wasn't going to start shooting until he knew who he was shooting at. His eyes were starting to adjust some to the darkness, but it was too little, too late.

He vaguely saw the shape looming up in front of him, and then something crashed into his forehead. He pitched backwards, his gun spinning away, and then they were all over him again.

They must have been waiting for him quite a while in the dark, and so they could see much better.

Strong hands gripped his arms and held him down. He kicked out as one of the men leaned over him, and the blow landed solidly in the man's stomach. He staggered back with a cry, and Shayne almost tore loose from the other two. The blow to the head had weakened him and made him groggy, though, and he couldn't quite pull free. They jerked him back, and his already aching head bounced on the floor.

"You bastard!" grated the man whom Shayne had kicked. "I ought to kill you!"

"Yeah!" one of the others said. "Let's kill him!"

"Not yet," the third one said calmly. "Not until he's talked."

The man tangled his fingers in Shayne's red hair and jerked his head back and forth. He growled, "You're going to talk, aren't you, shamus?"

"Y-yeah," Shayne gasped. "I'll talk!"

The man released his grip on Shayne's hair. "That's good. It'll go a lot better for you that way."

Now Shayne was glad it was dark, so that they couldn't see his face. It was twisted with rage and hate. He had made his voice sound defeated on purpose, in order to gain a little time to catch his breath. His mind was turning over the possibilities that could be behind this attack.

He didn't think these were the men who had been following him earlier. They hadn't had time to get here ahead of him. These men could be the ones who had searched the place, though, and they could be working with the ones who had been tailing him.

His first thought when he realized that there were three of them had been that they were the trio from the old house where he had been that afternoon. He could tell now that they weren't, though. It was hard to be sure in the shadows, but it didn't look like any of them had beards, and the voices were wrong, too.

Shayne drew a couple of deep breaths, then the man who seemed to be the leader said, "All right, Shayne, tell us what you know about Hilary. What's your angle in this?"

It wouldn't do any good to tell them that he didn't really know. He said ambiguously, "It's Brad . . ."

"You know where he is?"

"I might." He needed just a little more time to get some of his strength back . . .

"You'd better tell us, god-damit! If you do, maybe we won't kill you."

"All . . . all right," Shayne said, letting his voice drop. The man leaned over closer. "He's . . . he's . . ."

Shayne moved.

Using all the force in his brawny shoulders, he jerked his arms up

and together. His captors, lulled by his act, were taken by surprise. There was one holding each of his arms, and they suddenly found themselves crashing together. There was a resounding crack as their skulls met.

Shayne threw the two of them off and surged to his feet, driving a solid right fist into the stomach of the man he had kicked a few minutes earlier. The man doubled over, and Shayne brought his clasped hands down on the back of his neck, driving him down to the floor like a pole-axed steer.

There were footsteps behind him now. He spun, shooting a left at the dim figure coming toward him. It landed in the middle of a face. Shayne felt the nose give under the blow. The man fell backwards with a shout of pain.

The shout covered up the sound of the third man rushing Shayne. The detective was looking around for him when he was hit from behind by what felt like a gun. Sparks flew behind Shayne's eyes, and he felt himself slumping toward the floor. He stuck out a hand and grabbed a chair blindly, but it didn't stop him. He sprawled on the floor, feeling like the top of his head was erupting like a volcano. Faintly, he heard one of the men exclaim, "Let's get out of here!"

Shayne rolled from side to side in pain momentarily on the carpet as his attackers ran from the apartment. After what seemed like

a lot longer than it really was, the brass band inside his skull quit playing, and the room settled back to its normal position.

Shayne sat up, used the chair for support, and climbed to his feet. A few minutes of standing absolutely still brought him back to a level where his mind would function again. He looked around, saw the open door into the hall, and used the light coming through it to guide him to the bathroom. The light in there worked, and he could see now that intruders had simply removed the bulbs from the fixtures in the living room.

He splashed cold water in his face until he felt human again, then examined the place where he had been clouted. The skin wasn't broken, but a good-sized goose egg was coming up.

Shayne stared at his drawn face in the bathroom mirror and decided that he had made a mistake when he decided not to make Hilary level with him. Her lies had contributed to his headache, because the men who had given it to him were definitely mixed up with her search for Brad Adams.

When the morning came, Shayne promised his reflection, Miss High Society from Philly was going to come clean.

IV

OTHER THAN A TENDER LUMP

on the back of his head, Shayne was none the worse for wear when he woke up the next morning. A hot shower, followed by a few seconds of running the water icy-cold, invigorated him and made him feel ready to start the day. And the first order of business was a visit to Hilary Adams, if that was her name.

He called Lucy to let her know that he would be a little late getting to the office, then headed across the Bay to Hilary's hotel.

It was a beautiful day again in Miami, the palm trees along the boulevards swaying gently in the warm breeze, but Shayne wasn't in much of a mood to appreciate the wonders of nature. He was accustomed to clients lying to him, but that didn't mean he had to like it.

The tourists were leaving the hotel for a day of sightseeing as Shayne entered the lobby. He strode across it to the desk and said to the clerk on duty, "I need Miss Hilary Adams' room number."

The clerk frowned. "I'm sorry, sir, we don't give out room numbers; however, I can have the switchboard place a call to her suite —"

"I'm investigating a disappearance and an assault," Shayne growled, which was true enough. "I'd appreciate some cooperation. But if you don't feel like it . . ."

The clerk's frown was replaced by nervousness at the implied

threat. After a moment of consideration, he said, "Miss Adams is in Suite 510. I really should call up and announce you."

"Forget it. What you should do is act like I wasn't even here." Shayne wheeled and stalked toward the elevators.

It seemed to take a long time to ride up five floors, but Shayne knew that was just his natural impatience. When the elevator doors slid open on the fifth floor, his long legs carried him quickly down the hall. His gray eyes spotted the number he was looking for on a door at the end of the hall.

He jammed one hand in his pocket and used the other to rap sharply on the door. Hilary might not be up yet, but if she wasn't, that was just too bad. Shayne had never liked people pounding on him. Or lying to him.

There was no answer to his knock for a moment, then he heard stirrings on the other side of the door. Hilary's voice, sounding sleepy, called out, "Who is it?"

"Mike Shayne."

"Mr. Shayne! . . . Just a minute."

Hilary opened the door a few seconds later. She was belting a robe around her, and her hair was in slight disarray. She had either just gotten out of bed, or she was a good actress. Knowing what he did, Shayne was inclined to suspect the latter.

As he stepped into the suite,

Hilary said, "Have you found Brad, Mr. Shayne?" There was anxiety in her voice.

He fixed his cold gaze on her. "No, I haven't found him," he said flatly. "And now I want to know who he really is."

Hilary looked confused. "What do you mean? You know who he is, he's my brother."

"If that's so, then who are you? You sure as hell aren't a Philadelphia socialite, like you claimed!"

Hilary took a step backwards and exclaimed, "I — I don't understand! What are you accusing me of, Mr. Shayne? Has something happened?"

"You might say that." Shayne's voice was grim. "Since I took your case yesterday, I've been attacked twice, followed around for who knows how long, lied to, threatened . . . I don't understand either, Miss Adams. Suppose you explain it to me."

Fear was all over Hilary's face now. She kept backing away from Shayne. "I just don't know what you're talking about," she quavered. "You come in here first thing in the morning and start throwing wild accusations around —"

"Cut it out," Shayne snarled. "They're not wild accusations and you know it. I checked with a society reporter in Philly, and she had never heard of you or your so-called brother. You should have picked a cover story that

wasn't so easy to check up on."

Hilary looked like she wanted to run back into the bedroom of the suite. She pointed a trembling finger at Shayne and said, "You just get out of here. I don't want to hire you anymore. I want you to leave!"

Shayne closed the distance between them with two quick steps. Before she could duck back into the other room, he reached out and clamped his knobby fingers on her arm. "Listen," he said urgently, "I don't mind you lying to me as long you have a good reason. So go ahead, spill it, and we'll forget about the lies. If you're in trouble, I can help you a lot better if you tell me the truth."

A long moment passed as their eyes locked, Shayne's cold and intense, Hilary's wide and frightened. Then she suddenly turned her head away, crying out, "I can't! I just can't —"

Someone knocked on the door.

Shayne and Hilary both stiffened. He said, "Are you expecting someone else?"

Hilary shook her head, her teeth biting into her lower lip in nervousness.

"Ask who it is," Shayne told her.

She hesitated, then called out, "Who's there?"

A man's voice came back, "Room service, ma'am, with your breakfast."

"Did you order breakfast?"

Shayne asked in a whisper.

Hilary shook her head.

"Then tell him to leave."

Hilary looked at Shayne for a moment, as if she was considering calling out for help instead of sending the man away. But then she raised her voice and said through the door, "I didn't order any breakfast."

"Compliments of the management, ma'am," came back. "We always provide breakfast for our suites on the guest's first morning with us."

"I'm sorry, I don't want it. You can take it away, please."

"Well . . . I'll leave it out here, in case you want it later."

There was something about that voice that was familiar to Shayne. Quickly, he whispered to Hilary, "Let him in! I want to get a look at him."

"Why should I?" Hilary whispered back savagely.

"Look at it this way. As long as he's here, you won't be alone with a very angry private detective."

"Wait a minute out there!" Hilary called. "I've decided you can bring it in after all."

"That's fine, ma'am."

Shayne let go of Hilary's arm and stepped into the bedroom, closing the door behind him until only a crack remained. He kept his eye to the opening as Hilary went over to the other door and opened it.

A young, white-coated waiter

wheeled a breakfast cart into the room. He gave Hilary a smile and stepped back away from the cart with its covered contents. "Hope you enjoy your breakfast, ma'am," he said.

Shayne was studying him intently from the bedroom. He was an ordinary-looking young man . . . except that he had a bruise in the center of his forehead.

Shayne grimaced. That bruise was in the right place to have been received when Shayne cracked his attackers' skulls together the night before. That would explain why the voice sounded familiar, too. He needed proof, though.

Surprise might be the way to get it. He opened the bedroom door and stepped out into the room, saying, "Good morning, son."

The waiter's eyes turned toward Shayne, then widened in fear. That was all the proof Shayne needed.

He lunged across the room, reaching for the waiter. The white-jacketed young man ducked toward the door. Hilary let out a cry of surprise and fear.

The waiter eluded Shayne's charge and made it out into the hall. Shayne was just about to give chase when he realized that the real threat might still be in the suite.

Hilary was standing next to the breakfast cart, transfixed by the

sudden turn of events. Shayne dove for her, wrapping his arms around her and sending them both to the floor. He rolled, taking Hilary with him, away from the cart—

The explosion filled the room, sending a thundering cacophany of sound against Shayne's eardrums and showering both of them with debris. Hilary screamed and buried her face against Shayne's broad chest.

His ears ringing from the blast, Shayne pried Hilary loose and got to his feet. As far as he could tell, neither one of them was hurt, though Hilary was still screaming. He leaned over her and slapped her, his palm cracking sharply against her face.

"Stop it!" he snapped. "Hysterics won't help. You're all right. Just stay right here while I go after that guy!"

He darted for the door, pausing only a second to examine the ruins of the breakfast cart. It looked like most of the force of the bomb's explosion had gone upwards, because the cart was still largely intact, though twisted and charred somewhat. Such a blast would have killed anyone standing near the cart. The fragments of dishes and silverware would have served as deadly shrapnel.

Shayne's face was bleak as he ran into the hall and plunged toward the elevators. Frightened faces, stunned by the blast, peered out of other rooms, but

they drew back as the grim red-head raced by. He pulled up in front of the elevators.

It had been only seconds since the phony waiter had run from the suite, and all of the cars were at least three floors away, Shayne saw with a quick glance. That meant his quarry couldn't have caught one of the elevators. There was a door to a stairway a few feet away. Shayne jerked it open.

He could hear frantic, running footsteps a floor or so down. Shayne launched himself at the stairs, taking them three and four at a time, barely keeping himself under control.

He grabbed the bannister at each landing, swinging himself around and picking up momentum. By the time he reached the second floor landing, he could see the white coat of the waiter half a flight ahead of him. Shayne yelled, "Hold it, you bastard!"

The waiter grabbed the bannister himself, wheeled around, and brought a gun out from under his jacket. The pistol cracked, sending a slug screaming past Shayne's head.

He threw on the brakes and jerked his own gun out. The waiter fired again, chipping plaster from the wall near Shayne, then turned to run again. Shayne fired, barely missing the man's leg.

There was screaming coming from the lobby just below, and the sound of it increased as the

bomber emerged from the staircase brandishing a gun. Shayne was right behind him. The place was chaotic, thrown into a frenzy by the explosion and the shooting.

Shayne couldn't fire because of the scared mob milling around in the lobby. He saw the waiter pushing his way through, and he took off after him, doing some dodging and pushing of his own.

The waiter made it to the front doors of the hotel and bounded through them. Shayne was only twenty feet behind him now, but by the time the big detective made it to the sidewalk, the waiter was diving into the back seat of a waiting car.

There were two more men in the car, and one of them turned toward Shayne, bringing another gun to bear on him. Shayne went to one knee as the man fired, and the bullet cut through the space where his head had been a second earlier. Shayne squeezed off two quick shots at the vehicle as it took off from the curb.

His bullets hit the body of the car without doing any damage. The car plunged into the passing traffic, took a corner recklessly, and then was gone. Shayne stood up, glared after it, and said, "Damn!"

He holstered his gun, listened for a moment to the wailing of sirens as the police and fire departments responded to the calamity at the hotel, then stalked back inside.

Several members of the staff tried to stop him, but he brushed past them and boarded one of the elevators. He wanted to get back to Hilary as soon as possible.

The corridor on the fifth floor was full as Shayne got off the elevator. He made his way through them toward the suite.

A small fire had started inside the suite from the blast, but a hotel worker was putting it out with a fire extinguisher. Shayne bulled his way into the room, looked around, and asked the man wielding the fire extinguisher, "Where's Miss Adams?"

The man shrugged. "Don't know, mister. There wasn't anybody in here when I got here." He put the finishing touches on the fire.

Shayne jerked the door of the bedroom open. It was empty as well, though. There was no sign of Hilary anywhere in the suite.

He bit back the curses that sprang to his lips. They wouldn't do any good.

The bomb must have been meant for Hilary, but there was no way of knowing whether she had now disappeared on her own, or whether someone had grabbed her.

Shayne knelt beside the cart that had borne the bomb and examined what was left of it. The section that had been below the bomb was relatively undamaged, since the force had been concentrated in the other direction.

This was one more example of someone being an expert at what he was doing.

He leaned his head to one side and looked underneath that section, to see if enough unmarred area remained that fingerprints might be possible . . .

There was a word scrawled in chalk on the metal.

Shayne frowned. The writing wasn't very good, but there was no mistaking it. It was almost like a signature, a claim of credit for the bombing . . .

VIPER . . .

V

SHAYNE KNELT THERE for a long moment, studying the inscription and tugging at his ear, until an irritating voice said, "Well, well, what is this? I should have known you'd be on the scene of this carnage, Shayne."

Shayne glanced up and saw the short, well-dressed figure standing just inside the door. The newcomer had black eyes and hair, and a thin moustache of the same color adorned his upper lip. Shayne grunted, "Hello, Petey."

Peter Painter glared. He and Shayne had long been antagonists. The big redhead from across the Bay had been Painter's nemesis ever since the days when he headed the Miami Beach detective bureau. Now the Chief of Police, Painter still had no use for Shayne, and the feeling was mutual.

"What's going on here, Shayne?" Painter asked. "I was on my way to the office when I saw the fire department and my boys converging on this place. It looks like you've declared war."

"Not me," Shayne said. "A phony waiter brought this cart in here, and it had a bomb on it instead of breakfast."

Painter frowned. "You were here in the room when the bomb exploded?"

"That's right. I suppose you're disappointed that it didn't do a better job."

"You said that, not me," Painter said. "What were you doing here?"

"Visiting a client. She seems to have disappeared, by the way."

Police and fireman were coming in now, and the room was getting crowded. The firemen took a look around and then left, satisfied that they weren't needed, but the cops crowded around Shayne, firing questions at him.

"Who's this client of yours?" Painter asked.

"She's registered as Hilary Adams," Shayne said. "You'll have to ask her if that's her real name or not."

"Well, what happened to her? Was she hurt by the blast?"

"Not that I know of. She seemed to be all right when I left. I took off after the guy who brought the bomb, and she was gone when I got back."

"Did you catch the guy?"

Shayne shook his head. "He had a car waiting, with a driver and another guy riding shotgun." He didn't voice his suspicion that the three of them were the same ones who had jumped him in his apartment.

"Did you get a good look at the car?"

"Not good enough. It was a dark sedan; that was about all I had time to see before they started blasting at me again."

Painter folded his arms and took a deep breath. "All right, Shayne, what's this case all about? Why did Miss Adams hire you?" he demanded.

Shayne fixed Painter with a gaze every bit as unwavering as the bantam policeman's own. After a moment, Shayne said, "You know I don't have to tell you that, Painter. That's privileged information. And remember, I'm one of the victims here, not one of the bad guys."

Painter snorted. "How do I know that? You've played fast and loose with the law before, Shayne, and there's nothing I'd put past you."

"High praise, coming from you," Shayne said dryly. "Is it all right if I get out of here, Petey? I've got important things to do."

Painter's face paled in outrage. He snapped, "Before you go anywhere, you're going to give us a description of this mysterious client of yours."

"Sure." Shayne obliged by giving them an accurate, detailed description of Hilary. He wanted her found at least as much as Painter and his cops did.

Before he got out of the suite, though, Painter made him run through the story twice more, not really needing the information, but relishing the opportunity to inconvenience Shayne. Shayne had to keep a tight rein on his volatile temper and stop himself from blowing up at the pompous police chief.

Painter finally allowed him to leave, and Shayne muttered curses under his breath all the way down to his car. When he was rolling away from the hotel and back toward Biscayne Bay, he put his anger and impatience with Painter out of his mind and tried to concentrate on the real problems at hand.

The men who had ambushed him the night before had been looking for Brad Adams as well as wanting to know Shayne's connection with Hilary. Then today, they had tried to blow Hilary away. Whoever they were, they were obviously the enemy.

Then there was the question of Hilary's disappearance. He hadn't been gone from the suite long, but it had been long enough for someone to come in and grab Hilary. On the other hand, he had seen all three of his attackers roaring away down the street. Of course, they could have had yet

another partner, backing up the one who delivered the bomb.

The other possibility was that Hilary had left on her own. If she knew who it was that was after her, and knew that they would stop at nothing, she may have decided that disappearing was the best idea for the time being. Shayne had been out of the room long enough when he was chasing the waiter for her to have thrown some clothes on, grabbed a suitcase, and sneaked down the stairs. The more he thought about it, the more likely that scenario seemed to Shayne.

Shayne crossed the Bay and headed toward Flagler Street and his office. He was so deep in thought that he almost failed to notice the car behind him.

Almost, but not quite.

Again, the followers were good, damn good. They were hanging back, with two and sometimes three cars between them and Shayne's Buick. It was only Shayne's instinctive caution, plus his near-paranoia from trying to solve this case while he was in the dark on most of the facts, that made him notice them.

He drew a thumbnail along his jaw and glanced in the rearview mirror again. After thinking about the situation for a moment, he changed course, heading for his apartment hotel rather than the office.

After the explosion, it made sense that he would return home

to clean up a little bit, rather than go directly to the office. He hoped the followers realized that, too. All the members of the opposition, whether they were working together or not, seemed to know who he was and where he lived. He was counting on that.

Shayne turned into the basement garage of his apartment building and piloted the Buick to its usual space, just as he normally did. As he had turned in, he had seen the tail car pulling over to the curb behind him, obviously knowing that he lived here and prepared to wait for him to leave again.

Shayne usually rode the elevator up to his floor, but this time he took the stairs that led into the lobby: Waving a greeting to the desk clerk, who stared at his disheveled state, Shayne ducked out of one of the rear entrances.

One of the cabbies who made a habit of hanging around the apartments was parked on the side street, out of sight of the men who were following Shayne. The taxi driver was leaning against his hack, shooting the breeze with a newsstand operator, when Shayne strode up.

"Hi, Mr. Shayne," the driver greeted him. "Need a ride?"

"That's right, Jake," Shayne said. "I'd like to borrow your cab."

Jake frowned. "You want to drive yourself?"

"That's right." Shayne reached

out and plunked the man's cap off his head. "I'd like the hire of your hat, too."

The light dawned on Jake's face. "Hey, you must be working on a case!"

"You've got it," Shayne said, opening the cab's door and sliding behind the wheel. He pressed a hundred dollar bill into Jake's hand. "That good enough?"

"You bet! As long as the company don't hear about it."

"I'll keep my mouth shut, you can count on that. See you back here later, Jake."

As Shayne started the cab and pulled away from the curb, Jake called after him, "Try to bring it back without any bullet-holes, okay?"

Shayne pulled Jake's cap down over his eyes as he circled the block. He came up behind the car that had been dogging him and slid over to the curb a half block or so back of it. He could see that the two men were still in it.

Waiting was something that Shayne didn't like, but he had become damn good at it over the years. An hour later, he was still sitting there, keeping an eye on the two men, the OFF DUTY sign on top of the cab turned on.

The men must have been getting tired of the vigil, because the one on the passenger side suddenly leaned over, spoke rapidly to the driver, and then got out to stand nonchalantly in front of a

drugstore window. The driver started the car and pulled out into the light mid-morning traffic.

Shayne gave it a few seconds, then started after him. As he passed the second man, still standing in front of the drugstore, Shayne took a good look at him out of the corner of his eye.

This man was older than the three Shayne had knocked heads with twice now. He was conservatively-dressed, with a calm, average-looking face. Hardly the wild-eyed type Shayne had been encountering on this case.

He cruised on past. The man in the car must be on his way back to their home base, Shayne decided, while the one left behind would keep an eye on the apartment building. They didn't know that the tables had been turned on them, that Shayne was now the follower.

Tailing the man in the car turned out to be easy. The nondescript cab wouldn't stand out anywhere, and Shayne's quarry probably had no idea he was being followed. Shayne stayed behind him for several miles as they cut across Miami.

The man's destination turned out to be a small duplex in a peaceful residential neighborhood. Shayne saw the car pull into the driveway and watched the driver get out and go into the house. Making a mental note of the address as he passed by, Shayne headed back downtown. He had a

lot of things to do, not the least of which was to get the cab back to Jake before the taxi driver got too nervous. At least there were no bullet holes in it... yet.

VI

SHAYNE SWUNG BY his office before heading back to his apartment building. He thought he might as well check in with Lucy while his watchdogs thought he was somewhere else.

He parked Jake's cab on the street and left the cap there, settling his own hat back on his head. Lucy might think he was moonlighting as a hackie if he wore the cap into the office. His mouth quirked in a grin.

As he opened the door of the office and strolled in, he saw that they had company. A well-dressed, middle-aged man was sitting in the outer office, obviously waiting for him while Lucy typed up some correspondence. Shayne hung his hat on the rack and said, "Hello. I'm Mike Shayne. Can I help you?"

The man stood up and extended a hand. Shayne shook it as the man said, "Herbert Kenworth, Mr. Shayne. I'd like to discuss hiring you."

"I'm on a case right now, Mr. Kenworth —"

"Could I at least talk it over with you? Perhaps you could recommend someone to handle it for me?"

"Sure," Shayne shrugged, opening the door to his office. "Come on in."

Kenworth didn't seem to have noticed Shayne's rather rumpled appearance, but Lucy had. He saw her looking at him quizzically, and as he ushered Kenworth in, he mouthed *Later* at her.

When Shayne and Kenworth were both settled in chairs on opposite sides of the desk, Shayne said, "All right, Mr. Kenworth, what's the problem?"

Herbert Kenworth's broad face was twisted in anxious lines. He clasped his hands together, leaned forward, and said, "I want you to find my daughter."

Shayne frowned. First it was missing brothers, then missing daughters. Didn't anybody take their missing persons cases to the cops anymore?

"Well, like I said, I'm tied up on a case right now, but I can give you the name of another good private investigator. Really, though, you'd be better off going to the police."

"I've already notified the police. They haven't been able to help. You have such a good reputation in this town, Mr. Shayne, I was hoping you could help me."

"I'm sorry, Mr. Kenworth —"

"If it's a matter of money, you don't have to worry about that. I'm the owner of Trancor Electronics. Perhaps you've heard of us?"

Shayne shook his head.

"We're one of the largest electronics firms in the country. We provide microprocessor chips for the guidance control systems that NASA uses in its rockets. So you see, I can pay you whatever you like . . ."

"It's not a matter of money, Mr. Kenworth," Shayne said shortly. "It's a matter of time. I'm all wrapped up in a case right now, and I just wouldn't have the time to devote to yours. Now, in a day or so, when I get this case wrapped up, I might."

Indecision was evident on Kenworth's face. He ran a trembling hand over it and said, "I was counting on you to help me find Hilary . . ."

Shayne sat up suddenly. "Hilary? That's your daughter?"

"Why, yes, Hilary Kenworth. What is it, Mr. Shayne? Is something wrong?" There was fear in Kenworth's eyes.

"Did you happen to bring a picture of her with you today?"

"Yes, I did." The electronics magnate reached inside his coat and brought out a photograph. "This is Hilary."

Shayne reached over the desk and took it, prepared for the coincidence of names to be just that, a coincidence. But one look at the picture told him otherwise.

"Hilary Adams" stared up at him from the photo.

Shayne asked slowly, "Do you have any other children?"

"No . . . Hilary's an only child."

All the family I've got really. My wife has been dead for several years, and it's just Hilary and myself now." Absently, he said, "It was hard on me when she went off to college, but it was what she wanted to do."

Shayne leaned back in his chair, his brow corrugated, his blunt fingers tugging gently at his earlobe. He said, "How long has Hilary been missing?"

Kenworth's eyes brightened. "You've reconsidered? You'll take the case?"

"Maybe. Fill me in on what happened."

"Of course. Hilary's been gone for nearly two weeks now. You see, the spring semester was over about a month ago, and I could tell that Hilary was disturbed about something when she got home. She had only been there for a couple of weeks when she . . . she just left. She was gone one morning, along with some of her clothes. There was no note or anything. After she had been gone for several days, I contacted the police. So far, they haven't been able to help."

"You said Hilary was disturbed about something. Did she give you any hint about what was bothering her?"

Kenworth shook his head. "None at all. Things seemed to just get worse as time went by."

"Did she ever mention somebody, a boy maybe, that she was

friends with at school?"

"No, Hilary didn't talk about school very much."

"All right," Shayne said suddenly. "I'll take your case, Mr. Kenworth. I think I'll have the time for it, after all."

"Thank you," Kenworth said, and his words were heartfelt. "Knowing that a competent man like yourself is on the case makes me feel better. I'll write you a check. 'How much?'"

"Five hundred will do for a retainer. We can discuss the rest of it when I find Hilary. Where does she go to college, by the way?"

Kenworth told Shayne the name of the school as he wrote out the check, then thanked him again and left looking a little less haggard. Shayne turned his chair around to stare out the window and think.

He hadn't expected this development. He wondered if it was stretching things to have Hilary Kenworth show up in his office one day and her father the next. Experience had taught him not to believe overmuch in coincidence, but it had also taught him that the wildest of coincidences was possible. Shayne knew this much — he was going to go at this case from every angle possible until he had it figured out.

As he saw it, the problem was three-fold — find Brad Adams, whoever and wherever he was; find Hilary Kenworth; and find

out why he was being followed and lied to. Any one of those answers might lead to the other two.

At least he had some new information now, about Hilary's real identity, and also the fact that she was a college student. That might provide a lead to Brad Adams, considering that college was a likely place for the two of them to have met.

He stood up and let his long legs carry him into the outer office, where he said, "I'm going out again, Angel. This case is going to take a little research to crack."

Lucy paused in her work and said, "I'm surprised you took Mr. Kenworth's case, Michael. It's not like you to take on more than one case at a time."

"I'm not. Kenworth's missing daughter is our socialite from Philly?"

"What?"

"That's right. Her real name is Hilary Kenworth. Missing from home for two weeks. This case has got more angles than a Geometry class, Angel. I'll be back after lunch sometime."

Shayne went out, leaving a puzzled Lucy staring after him.

He had decided to hang onto the cab for the time being, since it afforded him freedom of movement without being watched. His first stop was the County Hall of Records. He wanted to find out who owned a certain duplex he had cruised by earlier.

To his surprise, the information wasn't available. He checked all the deeds and plats on file for that block, and it was as if that particular piece of property didn't exist.

Shayne glared down at the record books spread out before him. He wondered how in the world the owner of the duplex had managed to keep his ownership a secret.

It wasn't far from the records building to the offices of the *Miami Daily News*, so Shayne headed there next. He found Tim Rourke in his cubbyhole of an office just off the City Room.

The lanky reporter looked up from his desk and said, "Hi, Mike. What's up? You look like something's eating on you."

"It is," Shayne said, sitting down and lighting a cigarette.

"The same business that you called me about last night? The high society thing?"

"Yeah, only it turned out not to have anything to do with high society. Can you tell me anything about a guy named Herbert Kenworth?"

Rourke frowned for a moment in concentration as he flipped through his mental files. Then he said, "He's an electronics tycoon, right? I think I did a piece on his company a couple of years ago when they got a big government contract to supply electronics components to NASA. Is he mixed up in your case?"

"Definitely. Is there anything fishy about him?"

Rourke shook his head. "Not that I know of. From everything I've heard, he's a pillar of the community. Of course, you know that that can cover up a lot of things."

"Yeah," Shayne said thoughtfully. "Does the name Brad Adams mean anything to you?"

"Not a thing, I'm afraid. What's the story, Mike? Is it anything my readers would be interested in?"

"Maybe," Shayne said, "but I'm not ready to spill it yet."

"Just remember your friends when you are ready, okay?"

"Don't I always?" Shayne stood up, waved a hand in farewell, and strode out of the office.

He knew that the cabbie was probably having fits by now, so he headed back toward his hotel. When he got close, he traded hats again and once more became just a cruising hack driver. As he passed along in front of the building, he saw that the watcher who had been there earlier was nowhere in sight. Shayne circled around, spotted Jake waiting by the newsstand, and pulled the cab over.

"There you go," Shayne said as he got out, tossing Jake's cap back to him. "Thanks, Jake. It really came in handy, and as you can see, I didn't even get it shot up."

Jake looked at the second

hundred that Shayne had tucked into the cap and said, "Thank you, Mr. Shayne. Anytime!"

Shayne grinned and went through the lobby, down to the garage, where he slipped into his Buick again. He wheeled it out onto the street, pointing it in the direction of Miami police headquarters.

Chief of Police Will Gentry was at his desk when Shayne got there. The beefy chief looked up at him, shifted his unlit cigar from one side of his mouth to the other, and said, "Hello, Mike. I heard about that little fracas you got into over in Painter's turf this morning."

"Petey probably made it sound worse than it really was," Shayne said. "It was just a little bomb, that's all."

Gentry snorted. "Just a little bomb..."

"Will, what does the word *Viper* mean to you?"

"Some kind of snake, right?"

A vague idea had been floating around in Shayne's head. He decided to put part of it into words. "I think it's a name. It's either a person or a group of some kind. What I need to know is who's behind it."

"Any way I can help?"

"You can check the computer and find out if there's a guy named Brad Adams in it anywhere."

"Sure." Gentry picked up the phone and called down to the police department's computer

center, which was in touch with other police and law enforcement computers all over the country. Gentry relayed the name, then hung up and said to Shayne, "They'll get back to us in a few minutes."

Gentry was obviously curious about Shayne's request, but he didn't ask any questions, knowing that Shayne would tell him the whole story when he was ready. The two friends exchanged small talk while waiting for the computer operators to do their work.

About five minutes passed before Gentry's phone rang. The chief picked it up, grunted, "Yeah?" and began to take down notes on a pad. A minute later, he said, "Thanks," and put the receiver down.

"Adams is in the computer, all right," he said to Shayne. "No convictions, but he's been arrested several times on suspicion of arson and bombing. Seems he's some kind of radical."

"Where's he from?"

"Up north somewhere . . . Let me see . . ."

Gentry named a town, and Shayne grunted. It was the same city where Hilary Kenworth attended college. It looked like his guess that the two of them had met in college stood a good chance of being right.

"Thanks, Will," he said, standing up. "I don't suppose the computer knew where Adams is now."

"Nope, he seems to have dropped out of sight a few weeks ago. He's got a trial coming up, too. He's accused of blowing up a building on a college campus. Christ, I thought we'd seen the last of that kind of thing years ago!"

His face grim, Shayne said, "As long as people have gripes, real or imagined, there's going to be somebody who gets violent about them."

"I'm afraid you're right."

Shayne nodded and went out.

It was early afternoon now, and Shayne's stomach reminded him that he hadn't eaten. He pointed his Buick toward Flagler Street. Maybe he could take Lucy out to lunch. That reminded him . . . He hadn't asked her how her date went the night before.

As he drove back to the office, he tried to put together the facts he had and made them form a picture, but something kept going haywire. He went back and started at the beginning.

Assuming that there was something between Hilary Kenworth and Brad Adams, she would have wanted to find him when he disappeared, and she wouldn't have gone to the police with it because of Brad's trouble with the law. That would explain why she had come to Shayne with her story about a missing brother. The phone call had told her that Brad was in Miami, and she had had Shayne go the roundabout

way in tracing it in order to help protect Brad's real background. That made sense of a sort, the kind of logic a young girl might come up with when she was playing a dangerous game and trusted no one.

Could Brad have been behind the bombing, though? That didn't fit in with Shayne's theory that there was a relationship between the two of them. And who, or what, was *Viper*? Shayne had a feeling that the meaning behind that word might be the key to unlocking the whole mess.

He and Lucy could mull it all over at lunch. She was much more than a secretary to him; she also served as his best sounding board when he was working on a case.

Shayne parked the car and went quickly up to his office, hands jammed in his pockets as he strode down the hall toward the pebbled-glass door. He swung it open, said, "Hello, Angel — " and stopped dead in his tracks.

The two calm-faced, conservatively dressed men who had been tailing him earlier were standing there, one on each side of a terrified Lucy.

And both of them had guns in their hands.

VII

"COME ON IN, SHAYNE," the man on Lucy's right said. "We don't want any trouble."

Shayne leveled a cold stare at

him. "You've got a hell of a strange way of showing it," he growled.

"We had to do something when you gave us the slip. You must think you're pretty slick."

Shayne took a slow step further into his office. "What I think is that you'd better put those things up and get the hell out of here."

The man shook his head. "We can't do that. We've got a job to do. You're going to tell us everything you know about Hilary Kenworth and Brad Adams. How did you get mixed up with those two?"

"I don't know who you're talking about," Shayne lied.

"Oh, come on, Shayne! We know about those two; you don't have to cover up for the little bitch and her boyfriend. What we want to know is your connection. Are you part of what they're planning?"

"You tell me," Shayne grunted.

"Michael," Lucy put in, her voice soft and scared, "what's going on here?"

"These two bozos seem to have us mixed up with somebody else," Shayne said. "Don't worry, Angel. They're not going to hurt anybody."

The one who seemed to be the spokesman stepped forward, leaving his companion to cover Lucy. He said, "Don't be so sure, Shayne. If you're working with those traitors, don't expect any sympathy from us."

Flatly, Shayne said, "I told you,

I don't know what the hell you're talking about."

He was hoping to make the man angry enough to slip up and reveal just what was behind this invasion of the office. The man got angry, all right, Shayne saw, but he didn't seem to be about to reveal anything. He stepped forward, his face contorting, and snapped, "Goddammit, Shayne, I'm getting tired of you giving me the run-around! You'll talk, or I'll —"

"You'll what?" Shayne spat.

The man suddenly lashed out with the gun, intending to lay the barrel alongside Shayne's head. But Shayne wasn't there anymore.

The big redhead had ducked underneath the blow, and now he stepped forward, inside the man's reach, and pounded a hard blow to his belly. The man gasped and began to double over. His chin ran into Shayne's other fist, launched in an uppercut.

The man sailed backwards as Lucy let out an involuntary cry. He hit the desk, flipped backwards over it, and wound up tangled in the legs of his partner, who was swinging his gun toward Shayne.

Shayne began to leap across the room toward the man, but he knew he couldn't get there before the trigger was pulled. He didn't have to, though. Lucy snatched up a heavy ashtray from the desk, whirled in her chair, and drove the makeshift weapon into the man's stomach as hard as she

could. He let out a choked cry of pain.

Shayne's fist cracked into his jaw a second later, sending him to the floor in a heap beside the first man. Drawing a deep breath, Shayne stared down at them for a moment, then turned to Lucy.

"You all right, Angel?" he asked. "That was a good move you made. You saved my bacon."

"I'm fine, Michael. Who in the world are these men?"

"Let's see if we can find out."

Shayne picked up both guns, unloaded them and put them on the desk, then knelt beside the men and began going through their pockets.

When he had found both of their wallets, he stood up and opened them. "Arthur Benjamin and Warren Craddock," he said. "That doesn't tell us much. Interesting . . . Washington, D.C. licenses . . . and Virginia licenses. Plenty of money. No other I.D.'s. I'd say we've got a couple of mystery men on our hands, Angel."

Arthur Benjamin was the one who had tried to pistolwhip Shayne, which had certainly turned into a major mistake. Now, he began to stir, "Okay, Benjamin, suppose you do some talking now. Or do you want me to just call the cops?"

Benjamin sat up, shook his head to clear the cobwebs, and said, "All right, Shayne, you've got the drop on us. Go ahead and call the

cops. See if it does you any good." He sneered up at the big detective.

Shayne exchanged a glance with Lucy. That wasn't the reaction he had been expecting. Craddock was coming to, as well, but he proved to be no more cooperative than Benjamin. Both of them refused to answer any of Shayne's questions and insisted that he go ahead and call the cops if he wanted to.

Shayne finally shrugged. "Well, call Gentry, Angel, and tell him to send somebody to pick these two jokers up. We can't leave 'em lying around here cluttering up the office."

When Lucy had made the call, Shayne said, "Why don't you step down the hall for a minute?"

She gave him an apprehensive look, but she did as he said, carefully closing the door behind her.

Shayne sauntered over to where the two men were still sitting on the floor. He picked up the other gun from the desk, and held both of them nonchalantly. But the barrel of each one was pointing directly at a forehead.

"It'll take a few minutes for the cops to get here," Shayne said. "Lucy told them how you busted in here, waving guns around. Nobody's going to doubt my story if I tell them you jumped me again and I had to use these guns on you."

"Forget the tough guy act,"

Benjamin snarled. "It won't work, Shayne. We're not telling you anything."

"Your choice," Shayne said. His index fingers began to tighten on the triggers.

Benjamin and Craddock saw Shayne's fingers tensing, and their eyes got larger. Both of them paled as Shayne increased the pressure. Craddock swallowed, and tiny beads of sweat began to appear on Benjamin's forehead. Neither one of them said a word, though.

Both guns clicked.

Craddock closed his eyes and took a deep breath. Benjamin just stared up at Shayne and said, "You bastard."

Several uniformed officers arrived a minute later. Shayne turned the two men over to them and said, "Tell Gentry I'll call him a little later."

Lucy came in from the hall when the police and their two prisoners were gone and said, "Michael you should be ashamed of yourself. You probably scared those men out of their wits."

"Yeah, well, it didn't do me much good when I came in and found *them* holding guns on *you*, either," Shayne grunted. "Anyway, it told me something."

"What's that?"

"Those two are highly trained professionals. Sure, it was kind of a bonehead stunt to come in here like they did and try to bully information out of us, but I guess

they just let their pride get in the way. They must have been pretty peeved when they finally figured out that I had slipped away from their tail. But still, they didn't spill anything just now, when I was making it very easy for them to do just that. They didn't know the guns were unloaded. They were ready to let me blow their brains out before they told me who they were and what they were after."

"Do you have any ideas about the answers to those questions?" Lucy asked.

"Maybe," Shayne mused. He picked up the ashtray that Lucy had used so opportunely and put it back on the desk. "The way it looks to me, we've got two groups that are both looking for Hilary Kenworth and Brad Adams. Benjamin and Craddock are part of one bunch. The other group jumped me in my apartment last night and then tried to blow up Hilary with a bomb this morning."

Lucy hadn't heard about this part of the day's activities. She looked shocked, and Shayne filled her in quickly. He wound up by saying, "I don't think Hilary knows where Brad is, either, but she knows that a lot of people seem to be after both of them. She has to be running scared by now. It's a mess, Angel, pure and simple, and somehow, I think it all comes down to Brad Adams. I think he started it all by doing something that brought everybody

down on his head."

"So what's our next move?"

"Our next move is me going to see Herbert Kenworth. I think he can tell me more about his daughter than he did earlier. I want you to get on the phone to the college where Hilary is a student and find out what they know about her. I'll check back in with you as soon as I've talked with Kenworth."

"All right, Michael." As he turned to go, she said, "There won't be any more men with guns coming in here, will there, Michael?"

"I damn sure hope not," he muttered.

He looked up the addresses of both Kenworth's home and his Trancor Electronics plant, then headed for the plant, figuring that Kenworth would more than likely be there at this time of day.

He was halfway there before he realized that he had forgotten all about lunch.

But then it was hard to be hungry when people were running around with guns and bombs, and he still wasn't sure what the hell was going on!

VIII

AS SHAYNE WHEELED UP to the crowded parking lot of Trancor Electronics a little later, he wasn't any closer to getting things worked out in his head. He was trying to decide who the two

groups were that were after Hilary and Brad might be. He had a few ideas, but no proof of any kind. One thing was for sure — he was in the middle, and everybody in this game was playing for keeps.

There was a high chain-link fence around the plant, and the single entrance he saw was flanked by a guard booth. Shayne pulled up beside it and said to the guard that leaned out, "I'm here to see Mr. Kenworth. My name is Mike Shayne."

The guard's hand was on the butt of his gun as he answered, "You've got to have a pass."

"If you'll call Mr. Kenworth, he'll tell you to let me in."

"Can't do it." The guard looked and sounded adamant.

"Why not?"

"The boss isn't here, if it's any of your business. Now, why don't you get the hell out of here?"

The man seemed nervous, and his eyes kept darting around like he expected trouble at any moment, from any direction. Shayne asked, "Do you know if Kenworth is at home?"

"It's not my job to know things like that. Are you leaving or not?"

Shayne saw the guard's left hand stray back into the booth. He must have pressed some kind of alarm button, because a door in the plant building suddenly opened and four more guards came trotting out. Shayne's craggy brows went up in surprise as the guards came cutting across

the lot toward the entrance.

"Yeah," Shayne said slowly. "It looks like I'm leaving."

He put the Buick in reverse and started to back away as the other guards arrived at the booth. All of them had their guns out.

Frowning, he turned the car around and pointed it away from Trancor Electronics, watching the phalanx of guards in the mirror as he did so. They seemed to be ready for any kind of trouble, and Shayne wondered what had happened to put the plant on alert.

Kenworth's home was in Bal Harbour, the exclusive residential area north of Miami Beach, and Shayne headed in that direction. If Kenworth really wasn't at the plant, it was a good bet that he would be at home.

Passing a telephone booth, Shayne pulled over abruptly. He wanted to check with Lucy, find out what she had discovered by calling Hilary Kenworth's school.

He dialed the familiar office number and heard Lucy answer on the first ring. He said, "It's me, Angel. Did you do that checking on Hilary Kenworth?"

"I certainly did, Michael, and I found out a few things. I talked to both the Registrar's Office and to the head of Campus Security. They were familiar with Hilary and with Brad Adams, too."

"What did they have to say?"

"Hilary was a good student

when she first arrived there, but she fell in with a crowd of student radicals after she had been there a while. Brad Adams was one of that bunch. Brad was expelled eventually, and so were most of the rest of them. The group was suspected of causing several dangerous incidents on campus. Michael . . . I didn't know college kids did those kinds of things anymore. I thought they had all gone back to the fraternities and sororities."

"I guess not," Shayne said. "Gentry and I were talking about that earlier. Everybody seems to associate radicals, at least in this country, with the Sixties. But it hasn't been that long ago that the SLA kidnapped Patty Hearst. I suppose we'll always have violence around, as long as there's people."

"I'm afraid you're right."

"What happened with Hilary?" he asked. "Did she join the group?"

"She seems to have been on the fringes of it. The leaders were three young men named Tate, Grant, and Hollis. They disappeared about the same time that Brad Adams did." Lucy paused, then asked, "Are you making any sense out of it, Michael?"

He had been moving the pieces around in his head, still trying to make them come together and form a picture, and now they were starting to do just that. It was an inadequate picture, still lacking

some pieces and fuzzy around the edges, but he could see it coming together now.

"Yeah, Angel," Shayne said. "It makes sense. And if I'm right, I may know where Brad Adams is, as well as Hilary."

"Well, let me in on — Michael!" Her voice was a gasp.

"Angel!" Shayne rapped. "What is it?"

"Michael," Lucy said haltingly, "a man just came in, and he's —"

There was a moment of silence, then a man's voice came over the wire. It said calmly, "You'd better get back to your office, Mr. Shayne."

And then a dial tone buzzed in Shayne's ear.

A curse ripped from him. He slammed the receiver down and leaped back into his Buick. His anger was directed as much at himself as anyone else. Already this day, men had come into the office and terrorized Lucy, and by God, they weren't going to get away with it this time!

Shayne floored the accelerator and sent the car rocketing away from the curb, going south again, toward Flagler Street and the office. He threaded his way through the afternoon traffic recklessly, disregarding stop signs and red lights whenever it was possible.

Tires squealed as he turned from Miami Avenue onto Flagler. He left the Buick in a no parking zone in front of the office building,

bounded through the lobby to the surprise of passersby, and slipped through a pair of closing elevator doors.

The elevator seemed to crawl upwards. Shayne seethed as he waited for the floor indicators to change. When the doors finally slid open on his floor, he was out of the car in a flash.

He slid his gun out of its holster as he hurried down the corridor. They weren't going to catch him walking in unprepared this time.

Shayne knew full well that this could be a trap, but he didn't care. He was tired of being followed, lied to, and tricked . . . From now on, he was hitting this case hard and fast, and anyone who got in the way would just have to watch out.

The office door was unlocked, as he had expected. Pistol at the ready, he flung it open and went in crouching.

The outer office was empty. Lucy wasn't at her desk, and a quick check told him that her purse was gone, too. There didn't seem to be any signs of violence in the office.

The door to the inner office was closed. Shayne went to it quietly, turned the knob, and opened it.

The voice he had heard earlier on the phone came from inside.

"Come in, Mr. Shayne," it said. "I think it's time you and I had a talk."

IX

SHAYNE STEPPED INTO THE office slowly, keeping his gun leveled. The visitor was sitting in the client's chair in front of the desk, and he turned to face Shayne. The big detective stared at him and said, "Who the hell are you?"

The man was black, in his mid-forties perhaps, dressed much like the men who had invaded the office earlier. He didn't look particularly dangerous. He said mildly, "My name, believe it or not, is Jones. You can put the gun up if you want to. I think we're on the same side."

Shayne's face was bleak. "I'd rather you answer a few questions first."

"Like what's happened to Miss Hamilton? Nothing. I sent her home. I wanted to talk to you in absolute privacy. You can call her apartment if you like and check on her."

"I think I'll do just that," Shayne growled, going around the desk slowly and keeping the gun trained on the man who called himself Jones.

He was able to dial Lucy's number without taking his eyes off Jones, and when it had rung twice, he was relieved to hear the soft, familiar voice.

"Me, Angel. Are you all right?"

"Yes, Michael, I'm fine. Mr. Jones said you might call, that you might be worried about me. I'm here by myself, and nobody's

listening in. Has he told you what it's all about yet?"

"No. What did he say to get you out of here?"

"He showed me his identification and said it was a classified matter. Didn't he show you his card?"

"I haven't seen any card," Shayne said.

Jones reached slowly inside his coat and pulled out a card, which he laid on the desk in front of Shayne. He smiled politely.

Shayne glanced at the card and then said, "All right, Angel, if you're sure you're all right. I'll talk to you later." He hung up and picked up the card.

It was a standard government ID card, only it didn't identify the agency for which Jones worked, and the signature at the bottom came direct from 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue.

Shayne tossed it onto the desk. "Hell, anybody can get a card made up. Are you trying to tell me you're some kind of secret government agent?"

"That's exactly what I'm trying to tell you," Jones said quietly. "My organization is working closely with the FBI right now. Jake Donohue told me about you a little earlier today."

Shayne looked thoughtful. Donohue was an undercover FBI agent with whom he had worked on a case several months earlier. Jones had to have some kind of an in with the Bureau to even know of

Donohue's existence.

"Maybe you're starting to convince me," Shayne said. "But I still want to know some things. Was it your boys who came busting in here earlier today?"

Jones frowned. "That's right. They got overeager. I can assure you, Shayne, it'll be a long time before they're assigned to a sensitive case again. By the way, in case you're wondering, they're the ones who went through your apartment, too."

"I thought so. Did they also jump me there last night or have anything to do with bombing Hilary Kenworth's suite this morning?"

Jones shook his head. "Absolutely not. The men behind that are the ones my agency is after. You see, Shayne, our primary job at the moment is the breaking up of terrorist groups —"

"Like *Viper*?"

Shayne enjoyed the look of surprise on Jones's face. It told him that his deduction had been right and made the whole thing fit together a little better.

"How did you know about *Viper*?"

"I've got sources, too," Shayne said. "I know all about Tate and Grant and Hollis. Are they all that's left of the group now that Brad Adams and Hilary ran out on them?"

Jones let out a low whistle. "Damn, you are as good as Donohue said. You called it, Shayne.

According to the intelligence, the group decided to get away from campus violence and move up into full-fledged terrorist activities. The first target was the U.S. space program, which they feel is wasting money that could be put to better use elsewhere."

"I thought the space program had already been cut way back."

"Not far enough for these boys. They want it wiped out entirely."

"And they were planning on starting with Trancor Electronics, weren't they? If they could put Trancor out of business, that would cripple the program, since Trancor supplies such important components for it."

Jones smiled ruefully. "If you ever get tired of being a private detective, I know where you could put your talents to good use."

"No chance," Shayne snorted. "I'm my own boss in this business, hectic as it gets sometimes."

Jones nodded and said, "I figured you'd feel like that. Where do we go from here? What else do you know about it?"

"I know that the *Viper* group is trying to find and probably kill Hilary and Brad. I think they hoped Hilary would lead them to Brad, so they could eliminate them both at the same time. Brad must know exactly what it is they've got planned for Trancor."

"That's right," Jones nodded. "And we don't. That's why it's

so important that we find Brad Adams."

"At first, you didn't know where I fit in, did you?" Shayne mused. "You had a tail on Hilary, and after she came here, you put one on me, hoping I might find Adams for you, maybe. *Viper* must have thought the same thing. I'm surprised you didn't stumble over each other."

"Now that it's all out in the open, Shayne, how about working together?"

Shayne shook his head. "I don't think so. I like playing the game by myself."

Jones leaned forward and said, "This is important, Shayne. This country has been damn lucky. Terrorism hasn't touched us very often, not like it has other places in the world. But it's coming, unless we stop it. If a group like *Viper* gets away with using death and destruction to make a point, other groups will follow their lead."

"Maybe you're right," Shayne grunted. "But I've been in the middle ever since I started this case, and I think I'll see it out that way. Now, I've got things to do. Shut the door on your way out."

Disbelief was evident on Jones' face. "You mean you won't help us?"

"That's right. And this is a private office, Jones. Beat it, all right?"

Jones stood up, anger and surprise making his movements

jerky. He said, "I never thought you'd turn your back on us like this, Shayne. You disappoint me."

"All I give a damn about is whether I disappoint me. Now, are you leaving, or do I have to call the cops again, like I did with those pups of yours?"

"I'm leaving," Jones said shortly. He walked out, letting the door slam behind him. Shayne called after him, "And don't follow me anymore!"

The outer door slammed, too, and a broad grin creased Shayne's rugged face. Jones had bought the bit, all right, and Shayne would have bet the bank account that he wouldn't be able to go anywhere now without Jones and his men sticking to him like a burr.

But anyone who was keeping an eye on the office would never think now that Jones and he were working together. Not after the way Jones had stormed out. They still couldn't be sure where Shayne fit in.

And that was fine . . . just fine. Shayne stood up and stretched. He had been retained to find Brad Adams and Hilary Kenworth, and now it was time to do it.

X

IT WAS LATE AFTERNOON in Miami by now. Shayne headed directly toward Bal Harbour, his ultimate destination being Herbert Kenworth's house.

As he drove, he reviewed the

thinking that had pointed him in this direction. The beefed-up security and the nervousness of the guards at Trancor could have a simple explanation — Kenworth knew that his plant was the target of the *Viper* group. And there was another simple explanation for how he knew that.

Hilary and Brad could have told him.

As Shayne saw it, it was a chance worth taking. Hilary had probably gone underground after the bombing attempt, and if she had managed to locate Brad on her own, it was natural enough to think they might have gone to Kenworth. Maybe he did represent something that they didn't like, but they would have discovered by now that he was a more attractive alternative than their former companions. Even if Brad wasn't there, Shayne had a feeling that Hilary was.

He had no trouble finding Kenworth's house. Estate would have been a better description. It was a massive structure in the middle of a large lot, surrounded by brick walls and shrubs. Shayne turned in and followed a flagstone drive up to the house.

The front doors opened as he was getting out of the car. Kenworth stood there, looking worn and tired, but he managed a smile and said, "Mr. Shayne! What are you doing here? Have you found Hilary?"

"Not yet," Shayne replied

brusquely. "But I think I'm going to be doing just that, very soon."

"That's wonderful. Can I help you in some way?"

"You can let me in and let me look around the house. I think I'll find Hilary."

Shock stood out on Kenworth's face. "I — I'm afraid I don't know what you're talking about."

"The hell you don't," Shayne said, raising his voice so that it could be heard from the street. "Hilary's right here, and so's her boyfriend, Brad Adams."

Kenworth looked aghast. "I — I don't know . . . Mr. Shayne, I assure you . . ."

A new voice came from inside the house, cutting the industrialist off. "Forget it, Mr. Kenworth," it said. "He knows too much. Let him in."

Shayne looked past Kenworth; saw a shadowy figure inside the darkened house. There was a gun in the newcomer's hand.

"Get on in here," the figure said. "You've probably already been seen coming here."

Shayne certainly hoped so. He didn't tell them that, though, but said instead, "All right, Adams. I'm coming in."

He stepped inside, and Kenworth quickly closed the door behind him. A tall young man with brown hair and a slight lantern jaw stood in the foyer, holding the gun. He glared at Shayne and snapped, "You've ruined everything! The guys will be following

you. They'll know for sure now that Hilary and I are here."

Shayne was keeping his hands in plain sight and not making any sudden moves. Brad Adams looked haggard and stretched to the point where his nerves could snap at any second. He must have been on the run for a month now, and Shayne knew how desperate that could make a man.

"Hilary is here, isn't she?" he asked Kenworth.

"Yes," Kenworth said, his shoulders sagging. "You can imagine how surprised I was when she and Brad showed up here not long after I left your office, Mr. Shayne. It was just luck that they found each other —"

"Luck nothing," Adams snorted. "I've been hiding out here in Miami for weeks now, just trying to get a chance to see Hilary again. I didn't dare come here, because I was afraid the cops would be watching this place. But I heard that she was staying at a hotel over by the Beach. I went over there and ran into her just as she was leaving the hotel. She told me the guys had sent her a bomb. I never thought they'd go so far as to try to kill us. So we had to take a chance on coming here and hiding. And now, dammit, it's probably all ruined, thanks to you."

Shayne's eyes had adjusted to the dim interior by now, and he had no trouble seeing Hilary when she spoke up from a staircase.

"You shouldn't blame Mr. Shayne, Brad," she said. "I think he just meant to help."

"That's right," Shayne said. "All I had in mind —"

Gunfire rattled from outside.

Adams said, "Hell!" and swung the gun barrel toward Shayne, sure that he had betrayed them.

But Shayne was moving before any of them, leaping across the room and crashing into Adams, sweeping the gun aside and driving a punch into the young man's solar plexus. Adams grunted in pain. Shayne got his hand on the gun, twisted, and jerked it out of Adams' grip. He put his other hand on Adams' shoulder and pushed, sending the man spinning away. He lost his footing and sat down suddenly.

Shayne reversed the gun and covered him. "If you've got any sense at all," he rapped, "you'll stay there!"

He darted to a window and flicked a curtain back enough to see out into the dusk. Men were running toward the house, men that Shayne recognized, even in the dim light. The last time he had seen them, they had been fleeing from the bomb blast at the hotel.

Behind them were more men, these in hot pursuit. Shayne saw Jones among them, saw the government agent pull up, level his pistol, and squeeze off a shot. One of the three remaining mem-

bers of *Viper* stumbled and fell, clutching at his leg.

Shayne waved Kenworth, Hilary, and Adams back and whipped the window open. The other two would-be terrorists were only about twenty feet from the house now. Shayne yelled, "Hey!"

Their heads jerked up. Shayne triggered twice, the shots coming close together. One of the bullets missed, but the other broke a shoulder. The target sprawled on the grass, howling.

That left only one, the one who had masqueraded as a waiter earlier in the day. Now, he reached inside his shirt and pulled out a small package. Jones saw the move and yelled to his men, "Don't shoot!"

Shayne squinted in the dying light. There was no way of knowing for sure what was in that package; it could be nothing . . . but it could also be plastique or nitroglycerin, considering who was carrying it.

He evidently intended to hurl it at the house. Shayne threw a leg over the windowsill and dropped to the ground outside. The man pulled up short.

"You bastard!" he cried out. "You tricked us!"

"That's right," Shayne said flatly. "Now why don't you put that down and give it up, friend? No sense in getting killed."

Jones and his men were advancing slowly. The young man

darted a glance over his shoulder at them, then turned his wild-eyed gaze back to Shayne.

"I'm going to blow you away!" he shouted. "You'll all die, you and those traitors in the house."

"And you'll die, too," Shayne said, his voice quiet in the early evening. He raised the gun in his hand. As he had done in his office earlier, he lined up the barrel with a forehead . . . only this time the gun was loaded.

"You can throw that bomb if you want to," Shayne went on calmly. "What is it, nitro? No matter what it is, it's going to take a second or two for it to impact and go off. Plenty of time for me to put a bullet between your eyes."

The man was looking back and forth from Shayne to Jones and his men now, panic blossoming on his face. Shayne kept talking.

"This is a .45 caliber revolver," he said. "I won't miss with it. If the bullet hits the bridge of your nose, it'll smash that bone to powder and go directly into your brain. The exit wound will be much larger than the entry wound; it'll make a hole in the back of your head the size of a grapefruit. You won't feel anything after the first impact, of course, and you certainly won't see what happens with your bomb. For all you'll know, I might catch it and stop it from going off . . ."

The man's face suddenly twisted and tears ran down his

cheeks. His shoulders slumped in defeat. Jones was only a few feet from him now, and the government agent sprang forward lithely, grabbing the man's arm with one hand and the package with the other.

The last member of *Viper* sobbed and cried out, "You fools! We could have changed things! It wouldn't have mattered if a few people got killed . . ."

"You're wrong," Shayne said. "It would have mattered to me."

" . . . AND THEN JONES and his men carted them off. It's a toss-up what will happen to Brad Adams. He did jump bail, and he was mixed up in some explosions up north, so he'll serve some time, too. He's cooperating fully with Jones's agency, though, giving them some good leads to other underground groups that advocate violence. He's not the zealot he once was."

Lucy Hamilton was curled up beside Shayne on the sofa in her apartment, listening intently as he summarized the evening's events. She asked, "What about Hilary and her father?"

"They won't go to jail. The only law they broke was harboring a fugitive, and Jones isn't going to push on that one. Hilary says she's going to wait for Brad to get out of prison. Whether she will or not is anybody's guess."

"How did Mr. Jones feel about

the way you handled things?"

Shayne grinned widely. "Oh, he had a few things to say about high-handed private citizens interfering with government operations, and he commented about the luck of big dumb Irishmen, but overall, I don't think he minded too much."

"Michael . . . what was in that package?"

Shayne shrugged. "Nitro."

Lucy pillowed her face on Shayne's broad shoulder. "I'm just glad this one's over."

"Me, too, Angel. Me, too." Shayne got a thoughtful expression on his face. "I've been meaning to ask you all day and kept forgetting . . . How did your date go last night?"

Lucy looked up at him with a smile. "Well . . ." she said slowly, then planted a kiss on his mouth, snuggling closer against him.

"All I've got to say," she whispered a moment later, "is that there's only one Mike Shayne . . ."

Next Month Phyllis Shayne returns in

YESTERDAY'S ANGEL by Brett Halliday

Hey, wait a minute! **Phyllis** Shayne. Sure, that was Mike's wife, wasn't it — long before he met Lucy. But Phyllis died. At least that's the story. Is it possible that Mike's first love is still alive, that she's had amnesia all these years, and now she's returned to her husband? Be here and find out!

THE LAST WORD

by James M. Reasoner

I had just reached out to turn the little TV on when the door opened and a voice said, "Don't touch that dial." Jason and I jerked our heads up. Two men in jackets, slacks, and ski masks were standing just inside the door. Each of them held a gun!

I HAD JUST OPENED A BEER and put my feet up to watch Henry Fonda hitch a ride on a truck on his way back to Oklahoma when the telephone rang. I let it buzz twice so that I could get at least one good swallow.

The phone sat on a table next to my easy chair, so all I had to do was reach out, pick it up, and grunt, "Yeah?"

It didn't surprise me at all to

hear the voice of my editor, Jason Chambers. "I hate to bother you at home, Gary, but we need you to cover a story."

There was a time when I would have been thrilled to get such a call, back in the days when I spent my time in the Greenville *Banner's* morgue, writing obits. Now, though, after a day spent covering the mayor's press conference and a three-alarm fire

downtown, I just wanted to settle down with my beer and a good movie.

"This is supposed to be my night off, Jason."

"I know that, but *you* know how it is in the newspaper business. I'm down here at the Chamber of Commerce speaking at their banquet, and Ruthie just called to say that the Continental Liquor Store was held up a little while ago. I told her to send a photographer and that you'd meet him there."

"You're going to have to hire some more reporters, Jason. The way the town's growing, you and I can't handle all of it." I put the beer bottle down regretfully on a coaster. "But I'm on my way."

"Thanks, Gary."

"Do reporters get overtime?"

I hung up as he was laughing.

A patrol car with its lights still flashing was parked in front of the Continental Liquor Store when I arrived fifteen minutes later. As I got out of my car, I spotted Al Fandera, our news photographer, snapping some shots inside the store.

Two uniformed officers had their notebooks out and were interviewing a pudgy, bald-headed man who I took to be the owner. I paused outside the store long enough to take a look at the bullet hole in the window just below the neon sign.

One of the officers turned

around to give me a suspicious look as I came into the store. I didn't recognize him, so I held up my press card and said, "Jenson from the *Banner*."

Al came up to me and said, "How's it going, Gary?"

"Not too bad, considering I had better things to do with my evening. You get any good shots?"

"Not really. Nothing but the bullet hole has any drama to it."

I nodded and went on up to the cops. They were just closing their notebooks and turning away from the bald man. I said, "I'm Gary Jenson from the *Banner*. Could you tell me what happened?"

The man stuck his jaw out belligerently and said, "They just come in off the street with them masks and guns. Like to scared me to death."

One of the cops said, "Don't worry, Mr. Hooper. We'll get those guys."

"Damn well better! They got my whole day's receipts!"

"How much was that?" I asked.

"A little over four hundred dollars."

The two officers went out to their cars to finish their report. I asked Mr. Hooper, "Would you mind describing the robbers for me?"

"Well, like I say, there was two of them. I couldn't see their faces because they wore these ski masks, covered up all but their mouths and noses."

"What else were they wearing?"

"Jackets and slacks. Nothin' fancy. They each had a gun, too."

"A pistol?"

"Yep. One of 'em looked like a .38, the other maybe a .32."

"Was there anything distinctive about the men?"

"Nope. They was average height, I guess you'd say, and average built."

I was scribbling all this down in my notebook, despite the fact that it amounted to next to nothing. I went on, "How about their voices? Did they speak to you?"

"One of 'em did. Told me to hand over all the money in the register or they'd blow me away. Let me tell you, I handed it over plenty quick. I argued with a holdup man nearly twenty years ago and got a bullet in the shoulder for my trouble. That shoulder still aches in rainy weather. Let me tell you, I been real co-operative ever since."

"But there was nothing unusual about the voice?"

"Only what it was sayin'."

"Were the men white or black?"

"They was white, or at least their hands and faces were. Rest of 'em could've been purple, far as I could tell."

"How about it?" I gestured at the bullet hole in the window. "How did it happen?"

"I grabbed for the phone as soon as they went out the door. I

guess one of 'em looked back and saw me, 'cause they shot right through the window. The bullet missed me, but it busted a bottle of my best bourbon."

That explained the sharp smell of spilled liquor in the air. "And all this happened when?"

"About thirty minutes ago. I'd say it was about eight-forty-five. I was just gettin' ready to close up."

I closed my notebook and said, "Thank you, Mr. Hooper. We appreciate your cooperation."

"This goin' to be in the paper tomorrow?"

"I imagine so."

Hooper got an eager look on his face. "With a picture and everything?"

I nodded. "With a picture and everything."

JASON CHAMBERS looked at Al's picture of the bullet hole and my story underneath it and said, "Have you talked to the police today, Gary? Have they made any progress on the holdup?"

"I talked to Lieutenant Frazier a few minutes ago. They haven't picked up anybody yet. He's not too optimistic, either, unless those two try another job. Hooper's description wasn't any real help. Frazier says they'll just have to wait for these guys to slip up."

Jason considered. "Could be that they were transients. They may be long gone from Greenville by now."

"Frazier brought up that possibility, too."

"Well, you did a good job with what you had, Gary. I hope that the next time I have to call you on your night off, I've got something more interesting for you."

But nothing really interesting happened in Greenville for nearly a week. I covered two car wrecks, a fight at a neighborhood tavern, and a dog show. Oh, the thrilling life of a reporter.

That changed the morning I came into the office and found Jason pounding away on his typewriter, an excited look on his face. He saw me when I came in and called me over to his desk.

I propped a hip on the corner of the desk and yawned. Bogart and Bacall had been on the late show the night before, so I was sleepy this morning. I said, "What's up?"

"Another robbery. The same two guys hit the mattress factory for their payroll last night. Notice how considerate I was? I didn't interrupt you on your night off."

"Are you sure it was the same two guys?"

"The description fits perfectly, right down to the ski masks. Mr. Benjamin was out there getting the payroll ready for today when they popped up in his office. They didn't hurt him, but they made off with close to six thousand."

I whistled. That was a heck of a lot better than their haul at the

liquor store. I asked, "When did it happen?"

"A little after ten-thirty last night."

"Do the cops have any leads?"

"No. Frazier is sure it was the same two guys, but they don't know any more about who they are than they did before."

"What kind of headline are you going to run? CRIME WAVE HITS GREENVILLE?"

Jason shook his head solemnly. "No," he replied, "that would take up too much room. I don't want to bump your dog show story off the front page."

I decided on the better part of valor and retired to my desk. The thought crossed my mind briefly that Jason must have gone to the same school as Lou Grant and majored in Journalism, Sarcasm, and One-Liners.

I guess the way things were going, I wasn't too surprised the next Sunday night when Jason called me at home and said, "Get downtown right away. The cops just traded shots with our pair of robbers."

"I'm on my way."

When I hit the main drag, I saw the cop cars parked here and there, lights flashing. There was an ambulance there, too. An officer tried to stop my car a few blocks away, but this one I knew, and he let me past as soon as he saw who I was.

I spotted Lieutenant Frazier talking to several other officers

and pulled up nearby. Frazier gave me a glance as I got out, then went back to what he was saying.

As soon as he was through, I buttonholed him. "What's going on, Lieutenant."

"It's those same damn guys, Jenson. This time they broke into old Mr. Karras's magic shop. They tripped a silent alarm going in. We got a car here before they got out, and shots were fired on both sides. Officers Nelson and Barnes were both hit." His face was grim as he said it.

"How are they?"

"They'll be all right. Neither one of them was hurt very bad, but you know how it is. The two guys got away while both officers were down, before we could get any backup here."

I shook my head. This was turning into a bad business. I asked, "You're sure it was the same two guys?"

"Nelson and Barnes both saw them. It was the same guys, unless somebody else has started wearing ski masks. Which is possible, of course."

It was possible, all right, but Frazier looked like he was thinking the same thing I was. Greenville really did have a crime wave on its hands.

Al Fandera came skidding up in his old car, and I told him to get some shots of the magic shop. Stray bullets had shattered the big front window. Broken glass covered a display of false noses.

Mr. Karras came out of the shop, talking to one of Frazier's detectives. "I don't understand it," he was saying. "I never keep much cash in the shop. Why, there wasn't over a hundred dollars in there."

I fell into step beside him. "Mr. Karras," I asked, "was there anything else taken besides the cash?"

"What do you expect them to take, joy buzzers?" He looked at me sharply. "Didn't you use to be little Gary Jenson?"

"Uh, yeah, I guess so."

"You never did come back and pay me for that vanishing water glass trick like you said you would!"

The cops standing around began to snicker. I got on with my questions hurriedly, wishing that some people didn't have such long memories.

This was front page stuff, all right, what with the wounding of the policemen and the unusual location. I went back to the *Banner* with Al and pounded out copy for a while, working fast so as to get the story in before we put the paper to bed. Jason was there, too, of course, and while I was writing the robbery story, he was doing an editorial about the rising crime rate. We were all pretty busy for a few hours.

By the time I got home and switched on my TV, the news was coming on. I didn't want to hear all about it again, so I turned

it off and headed for bed.

I worked follow-up on the story the next morning. The police were still stumped. Frazier told me, "We're in the dark until they establish some kind of a pattern. All of the robberies were on different days of the week and at different times of night. And there doesn't seem to be any logic to their choice of targets. Of course, liquor store heists are common, and that payroll job was a good one for them, but who can figure the magic shop? Off the record, Jensen, it's just plain batty."

The afternoon I spent slotting in wire service fillers, everything from koala-throwing competition in Australia to overnight Neilson ratings showing that the annual telecast of "The Wizard of Oz" had clobbered the other networks again.

I guess Jason and I were kind of sitting on pins and needles just like the police, waiting for the robbers to surface again. The cops' nightly patrols had been stepped up some, but they were short-handed to start with and couldn't even start to cover everything all the time.

Several days had passed since the burglary at the magic shop, and the *Banner* had to go on about its business, which meant that I kept busy covering all the various goings-on around the city.

I came into the office late one afternoon after attending a meeting of the Water Board and

asked Jensen, "Would it be all right if I took off a little early?"

He looked up from his typewriter. "You have something planned? A heavy date, maybe?"

"Yeah, with Jimmy Stewart. The educational channel has Frank Capra's *It's a Wonderful Life* on."

Jason leaned back in his chair and looked thoughtful. After a moment, he said, "You watch a lot of movies, don't you, Gary?"

I shrugged. "I like 'em. All kinds."

"I've been thinking about something. I think it's about time the *Banner* had a film critic."

I felt a little quickening inside. "Are you offering me the job?"

"I haven't had time to see a movie since Gary Cooper died, and you're the only other writer around here. How about it?"

I tried to keep the big grin off my face, unsuccessfully. "I'd love it. You know, I reviewed movies for the college paper."

"Well, you shouldn't have any trouble, then. I know where you should start, too. The Southwood Cinema out at the new shopping mall is opening this weekend. Why don't you go see the movies they've got and write some nice long reviews for next week?"

"All four movies?"

"Why not?"

I stood up, feeling ten pounds lighter. "Gene Shalit, watch out!"

It didn't take me long to type up the latest doings of the Water

Board. I dropped the story off on Jason's desk and headed for the door, feeling better than I had for a long time. I had thought all along that I would make a good film critic, but I wasn't going to suggest it to Jason.

It was the far side of twilight outside as I went to my car, which was parked down the street from the *Banner's* office. I almost felt like whistling as I walked along. I don't know what it was that drew my attention across the street, to the offices of the First Greenville Building and Loan Association.

I stopped dead in my tracks. An alley ran alongside the Building and Loan, with a door leading inside, and two figures were definitely coming out of it. I couldn't see them too well, but they were there.

They came towards the lights of the street, and then I saw the ski masks. Without even thinking, I yelled, "Hey!"

One of them jerked around and his arm came up. He was holding something in his hand. My mouth dropped open when I realized what it was.

I dove for cover as the gun exploded. For the first time in my life, I heard the whine of a bullet passing close by my head. I landed hard on the sidewalk behind a parked car as the slug thudded into a wall somewhere behind me.

Car doors slammed and tires squealed, and I jumped back to

my feet, which was a foolish thing to do. Luckily, I didn't get shot. Instead, I saw the rear end of a car tearing around a corner.

I caught a glimpse of the license plate and impressed it on my memory. About that time, Jason and the rest of the staff of the *Banner*, having heard the shot, came pouring out into the street. Jason ran up to me and snapped, "Gary, are you all right?"

I dusted myself off and said, "I may be bruised in the morning, but other than that, I'm fine. We'd better call Lieutenant Frazier, though."

"What happened?"

I nodded across the street. "Our two friends just paid a visit to the Building and Loan."

An hour later, Frazier was saying savagely, "They got nearly seventeen thousand this time. Damn! I've been after Mitchell there at the Building and Loan to get a time lock for his vault, but he didn't want to go to that much expense. He'll probably go ahead and lock the barn door, now that the horse is gone."

"Were you able to recover the bullet?" I asked.

"Yeah, but it's pretty well splattered. Looks like a .38, but that's about all we can tell from it." He frowned and rubbed the heavy beard stubble on his jaw. "These guys, whoever they are, are professionals. The lock on that vault didn't give them any trouble. You know, I'm starting

to think that they jack around with little stuff like the liquor store and the magic shop just to confuse us, so that we don't know where to expect them next."

"Surely they're using some kind of pattern," Jason said, "even if the small robberies are just diversions."

"You tell us what it is, then."

Well, we couldn't, of course, so we went back to the office to write about what we did know and Frazier went back to headquarters, probably to pull out his hair. Jason told me to go on home, but after being shot at, I was in no mood to sit down and watch a movie, so matter how good it was.

A COUPLE OF DAYS PASSED, and my knees stopped shaking. I started thinking less about how close the bullet had come and more about my new assignment. I called the manager of the Southwood Cinema and told him what Jason had in mind. He was very cooperative, telling me to come see the movies any time and offering me publicity stills from each feature. He was tickled to be getting some free publicity.

I saw two of the movies on Friday night and two on Saturday afternoon. By the time I walked out into the lobby of the theater a little before five on Saturday afternoon, my eyes were bleary and my brain was likewise.

The manager spotted me from his cubicle of an office and waved

me over. "What did you think?" he asked anxiously.

I considered for a moment and then said diplomatically, "You've got a real nice theater here."

I didn't fool him. "You didn't like the movies."

"Well . . . It's hard to say. There's nothing but sequels and remakes anymore. How often do you find a film that's really original?"

He sighed. "I know what you mean. To tell you the truth, Mr. Jenson, I hardly ever watch the movies I show now. It didn't used to be that way. I started in the theater business nearly forty years ago, and I watched all the movies then. Ah, we had some good ones in those days. But you wouldn't know about that."

"Sure I do. I watch old movies on TV all the time. I like them better, too."

A smile lit up his face. "Haven't there been some great ones on lately? Why, just in the past few weeks I've seen *The Grapes of Wrath* and *The Big Sleep* and *The Wizard of Oz* and *It's a Wonderful Life*. Now those are movies!"

He looked up and saw the dumb expression on my face. "Mr. Jenson! Are you all right?"

"Yeah," I nodded slowly. "I'm just fine."

NEARLY ANOTHER WEEK had gone by. It was Friday evening, and I came into the office carrying

a portable black-and-white television. As I sat it down on my desk, Jason looked up from what he was working on and said, "Something special on?"

"Just a movie I saw a long time ago and want to see again."

Jason looked at me for a moment like I was a hopeless case, then went back to his typing. I looked at my watch, then sat down and drew my phone over to where I could reach it.

"Lieutenant Frazier, please," I said when the dispatcher at police headquarters answered.

When Frazier came on the line, I said, "This is Gary Jenson over at the *Banner*, Lieutenant. Do you think you could drop by over here in about thirty minutes?"

"What's it about, Jenson?"

"I think I've figured out something about these robberies."

"Well, don't keep it to yourself. What is it?"

"I'd rather tell you in person."

Frazier fumed for a few seconds, then said, "All right. I'll be over there in a little while."

Jason had overheard my end of the conversation, and when I hung up; he asked, "What was that all about? Or won't you tell me, either?"

"I'm sorry, Jason. I'd rather tell it just once."

I could tell by his expression that he didn't want to let it drop, but he wasn't the type to put any pressure on me when I didn't want to talk. He wasn't just about

to threaten me with my job over it. He just shrugged and said, "I suppose it'll be worth waiting for. Your little ideas usually are."

I tried to catch up on my work a little bit, but I was getting more nervous by the second. It got to where I didn't even know what I was typing, so I just let it go. The waiting would be over soon anyway, and I would know if I had been right.

The paper had already been put to bed, and now everyone else on the staff was either back in the production plant or already gone home. Jason and I were alone in the big office. He was just putting the finishing touches on the bank deposit he always dropped off on his way home every Friday night.

I had just reached out to turn the little TV on when the door opened and a voice said, "Don't touch that dial."

Jason and I both jerked our heads up. Two men in jackets, slacks, and ski masks were standing just inside the door. Each of them held a gun, and the barrels didn't waver, even when one of them chuckled at the hokey line.

"What is this?" Jason demanded.

"You know damn well what it is. You and Bright Eyes over there just stand up slow and move over against the wall. Leave the money right there."

"Most of it is in rolls of coins from the paper machines," I put

in. "You're going to get awfully tired lugging it around."

"You let us worry about that. Now move!"

Jason sighed. "Do what he says, Gary."

We started moving slowly away from our desks. A flicker of movement from outside caught my eye, and I saw Lieutenant Frazier through the front window. Judging by his open mouth and gaping eyes, he saw what was going on, too.

I yelled, "Watch it, Jason!" as Frazier jerked his gun out and hit the door. Jason and I both dived for the floor.

Frazier came barrelling in, shouting, "Hold it!" The two robbers spun, caught by surprise. I came up into a crouch and left my feet in the same flying tackle I used to use in sandlot football games.

I smashed into one of the robbers as a gun went off. Jason was yelling for help. I had my hands full with the guy I had brought down. I felt a lot better once I saw his gun spinning away down the floor.

Some of the production workers ran in from the plant, and among all of us, it didn't take long to get the two robbers under wraps. One of them had been shot in the shoulder by Frazier, but that was the only injury. They were just ordinary-looking guys once the ski masks were stripped off. You would never have known that they

had stood the whole town on its ear for several weeks.

Frazier sent them off to jail in a patrol car and then said, "What a stroke of luck! I knew they'd make a mistake sometime, and then we'd get them. What was that theory of yours, anyway, Jenson? Not that it matters now."

"You're right," I smiled. "It doesn't matter now."

When Frazier had gone and things had settled down a little bit, Jason came over to where I was sitting at my desk and said sternly, "All right, Gary, you may have fooled Frazier, but I know better. You were expecting this robbery attempt, weren't you?"

I didn't see any point in lying to Jason. I opened my notebook and handed it to him.

"Those are the dates of the other robberies, and also their locations."

"So? We knew all this."

I opened a drawer in my desk and pulled out the TV logs for the last few weeks. "Look at the movies I've circled and check the dates."

"*The Grapes of Wrath, The Big Sleep, The Wizard of Oz, It's a Wonderful Life,*" he read off. "And they match the dates of the robberies. But what's the connection — Oh, no."

"*The Grapes of Wrath* was on the night the liquor store was held up. They hit the mattress factory on the night of *The Big Sleep. The Wizard of Oz* and the

magic shop job match up, and *It's a Wonderful Life*, which centers around the Bailey Brothers Building and Loan, was on the night they burglarized the Greenville Building and Loan, not to mention taking a shot at me."

"But why would they do such a crazy thing?"

I spread my hands. "Like Frazier said, to confuse the issue. And maybe for a joke. I guess they're old movie buffs, like me. You've got to admit, it nearly worked."

"And you knew they were going to try to lift the bank deposit tonight. Don't deny it." He poked a finger at my notes and the TV listings. "I want you to put all his stuff in when you write up the story."

I grinned. "Frazier won't like it."

"Who cares what Frazier likes? It's part of the story." He paused. "I still want to know how come you expected them and called Frazier ahead of time."

"Well, I wasn't completely sure I was right about all this, so I thought tonight would be a good test, considering the movie that's on."

"Which is?"

I reached out and turned on the set. When the tube lit up, a huge NO TRESPASSING sign on a chain link fence filled the screen. Jason said, "I should have known."

I smiled as the dying newspaper tycoon Charles Foster Kane breathed his last word:

"Rosebud..."

©

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A Blend of Murder

by Dick Stodghill

Jablonski was a tobacco dealer, not a criminologist. Yet it might be just that specialized knowledge of his that would enable him to smoke out a killer!

JABLONSKI PLACED THE PACK of tobacco on the counter at the same time Mervin Darcy said, "Better make it two."

Not much of an inconvenience, a few steps down the aisle again, but still it was typical of Mervin Darcy. The expression on Darcy's face told Stanley Jablonski the man had known all along that he wanted two packs. Giving orders, making those he dealt with fetch and carry, was one of life's pleasures for Mervin Darcy. Keeping people off balance, never letting them know what to expect, was another. He packed weight and enjoyed throwing it around.

Jablonski mumbled his thanks when a dollar bill and the correct

number of coins were dropped on the counter. He busied himself at the cash register as the smirking, florid-faced Darcy walked out the door. No more than ten seconds passed before it was flung open again and Garland Gant, owner of the jewelry store next door, burst wild-eyed into the Leatherstocking Pipe Shop.

"That s.o.b." Gant shouted. "I could kill him!"

Jablonski chuckled. "Talking about Mervin Darcy, I suppose."

"You know I am, Jab, who else? You'll never believe what he's done this time."

Jablonski, resuming his polishing of a stubby, curved

Jobey, shrugged his shoulders and said, "Maybe not, but try me."

"Remember about three months ago he bought an engagement ring? The best I had in the store. Paid nearly two thousand for it."

Jablonski nodded. "Never could figure what Jenny Palmer sees in the guy unless it's money."

"Whatever it was, it's over. Just before he came in here Darcy was in the store and said the engagement's off and demanded his money back. All of it, can you imagine?"

Jablonski gave the Jobey a final loving swipe with the polishing cloth before placing it in a display case. "Knowing Darcy I can. Wonder what happened, though. Whatever it was, you can bet Darcy was the cause of it."

"I hear he's been escorting Hazel Miniver around lately. That wouldn't have set well with Jenny, them being engaged and all."

"Spect not. Far as the money goes, don't see you're obligated to refund it after all this time."

"What can I do?" Gant said, palms extended, facial muscles sagging. "He's one of my best customers and he knows it. I started to write out a check but he said he wanted cash so I told him I'd get it when the banks open in the morning."

"Up to you, Garland. Lot of money, though. Not sure what I'd

do under the circumstances, good customer or not."

It was still on Jablonski's mind half an hour later when he locked up and walked down Main Street to the Veteran's Club, coat collar turned up against a biting north wind off Otsego Lake. A drink and a little conversation at the club, dinner at the hotel round the corner, an evening with a good book in front of the wood stove at home. The cold-weather rut that Jablonski loved. There was no room for the likes of Mervin Darcy in the comfortable routine so he pushed the thoughts aside.

The ringing of the telephone, disturbingly loud at nine in the morning, startled Jablonski. "First time the damn thing's rung in a week," he complained aloud although he was alone in the shop. "Hell of a way to start the day, talking on the telephone." He picked it up and snarled, "Lo," into the mouthpiece.

"Can you get away from the shop for a little while, Jab, and come down to Mervin Darcy's place on Lake Street?"

Jablonski recognized the caller's voice, realized it contained a note of urgency, but still he hesitated. The fact Hubert Turner was chief of police didn't give him the right to expect people to close up shop and come running at his beck and call.

"Don't know, Hubert. Means I'd have to lock up and —"

"It's important, Jab, or I

wouldn't ask."

The first coffee of the day was starting to run from the machine down into the glass server and Jablonski studied the stream of dark liquid longingly. Damn, he thought but aloud said, "All right, Hubert, all right. So close I'll just walk down. Be there in five minutes."

Jablonski grudgingly unplugged the coffee maker, hung a sign promising his imminent return in the window, locked the door and set out, muttering aloud over the lack of consideration shown by public employees. "Think a businessman can just walk out any time he feels like it, customers and money be damned." The only living thing within hearing, a small, wiry-haired black dog shivering in the doorway of Gant's Jewelry Store, responded with a feeble wag of its tail.

The nearly deserted street indicated few customers would be inconvenienced by Jablonski's absence and his coffee would suffer little loss. He'd sell some tobacco and a few cigars later in the day, perhaps even a pipe or two. For the most part, however, the tourists who provided the bulk of his business had abandoned Cooperstown for the winter. There'd be a scattering of them visiting the Baseball Hall of Fame a block down the street and some out at the Farmers Museum but aside from the two weeks preceding Christmas he'd keep the

shop open the next few months more as a service to regular customers than as a money-making proposition.

As he turned onto Pioneer Street the wind off the lake two blocks away stung his cheeks, made him lean forward to maintain his balance. Whitecaps crowned the choppy gray water and, Jablonski thought, if Fenimore Cooper could see the lake today he certainly wouldn't call it the Glimmerglass.

Hubert Turner held the front door open as Jablonski approached. Mervin Darcy's large white house, like many of the older ones in the village, was set back from the sidewalk only enough to allow the opening of the door without endangering passers-by. Jablonski pushed his way past Turner and the chief, battling the wind, closed the door behind him. In a muted voice the heavy-set, uniformed man, perspiring despite the chill in the air, said, "Do you know what happened?"

"Yep. You asked me to close up shop and come down —"

"No, no, Jab. I mean about Darcy?"

Jablonski studied the other man from dark eyes under bushy gray brows that now were raised. The chief, he thought, needed exercise. Like vigorously pushing himself away from the dinner table. He said, "What about Darcy? And why the hell are you whispering?"

The chief cleared his throat and, after a false start, said self-consciously and too loudly, "He's dead."

"Dead? I'll be damned!" Jablonski paused, let the surprising news sink in. Then, more subdued, "Why call me, Hubert? Mervin and I weren't exactly bosom buddies."

"You sell him tobacco, don't you?"

"Did. Lost a customer, though, from the sound of it. Right at the start of the slow season, too."

"You can tell one kind of tobacco from another, can't you?"

"Raw tobaccos or blends?"

"The kind you sell at the shop."

Jablonski sighed. People could be so damned stupid. "Blends," he said softly and then, louder, "My God, Hubert, have you any idea how many of them there are? Hundreds, literally hundreds." He shook his head, gritted his teeth, let his shoulders sag. "Is that what you got me down here for, to try to identify a blend?"

Turner gave him a crestfallen look and a hangdog nod.

Jablonski's eyebrows went up again as the implication of the chief's summons finally dawned on him. He said, "Suppose you tell me what's going on, Hubert. You trying to say Mervin Darcy's been murdered?"

Turner stepped up the tempo of his nodding. "Murder or suicide."

"Humph!" Jablonski countered the chief's nodding by emphati-

cally shaking his own head from side to side. "Not suicide," he asserted. "Not Mervin Darcy. Too sold on himself for that. Besides, he bought two packs of tobacco just yesterday afternoon."

Bewilderment showed in Turner's face. "What's that got to do with it?"

"Hubert, why in the hell would he buy two packs if he was getting set to do himself in?"

"Maybe he just decided sudden like."

"Mervin Darcy? Ridiculous! But are we going to stand here all morning, Hubert, or are you going to show me that tobacco?"

"In here," Turner said, walking a few steps down the hall and turning into a large room lined on all four sides by ceiling-high bookshelves. Jablonski followed but once inside the room stopped short. Startled by the sight of Darcy's lifeless body seated with legs crossed in a high-backed leather chair. A pistol was gripped in his right hand and the front of his smoking jacket was crusted with dried blood. An expensive Dunhill briar lay in his lap.

"Damn it, Hubert," Jablonski complained, "you might have warned me he was sitting here like this. Gave me a start, coming on him that way."

"Sorry, Jab. Guess I forgot."

"Forgot?" Jablonski, shaking his head, chuckled a little. "Tell me, Hubert, how many murders you handled?"

"Not too many."

"How many?"

"One, I guess."

"This one, right?"

Turner nodded sheepishly.

"Don't get too many here."

"Good thing, I'd say. Hate to have you forget and leave bodies sitting all over town. As long as you had to have one, though, it don't surprise me any it's Darcy. Any man that'd treat a pipe the way he did —"

"How's that, Jab?"

"Banging them against anything handy to knock the ashes out. Letting the cake build up until it was thicker than the bowl."

"That's bad, is it?"

"Course it's bad. Always scarring them up or breaking them. And letting the cake get so thick is what cracks the bowl. Heat expansion. Really burns me up to see somebody mistreat a good pipe."

Jablonski scowled when he caught Turner studying him. "You can quit giving me the fish eye, Hubert. I didn't shoot him just because he was a pipe abuser, if that's what you thinking."

"Course not, Jab. I wasn't thinking anything like that. It's just that you sounded so —" Turner, anxious to change the subject, walked with exaggerated briskness to a table beside a chair facing the one holding the body and ten feet or so from it. Pointing to a large glass ashtray he said, "Here's the tobacco."

Jablonski joined him, knelt beside the table and examined the contents of the ashtray. It held a quantity of ashes, half a dozen cigarette butts and what appeared to be nearly a full bowl of unburned pipe tobacco. He picked up a little of the tobacco peered at it closely for a moment and said, "Well, this isn't Darcy's. I can tell you that straight off."

"You recognize it, Jab?"

"Yep. One of my own blends as a matter of fact. Blend 15, the one I call Mohican. A treat for the outdoorsman."

"Why do you call it that, Jab?"

"Cause if you smoke it inside, most women would boot you right out of the house. It's strong. Pretty heady stuff." Jablonski's upper body rocked in silent laughter. "Figured Mohican was a good name for it. If the tribe had used this blend in their peace pipes it might have been the last of them."

Turner's face was blank for a moment, then he grinned. "I get it, Jab. Last of the Mohicans, right?"

Jablonski muttered something unintelligible under his breath, sighed and said, "Right, Hubert, you figured it out."

"How do you know for sure that's what it is?"

"By the Irish Aromatic. Only use it in two blends and Blend 10 — Sultan of Swat — only has two percent of it. Mohican has

eighteen percent and besides it has perique and latakia and Blend 10 doesn't."

"How many guys smoke this Mohican?"

"Not many. Half a dozen regulars, maybe. Sell a lot to tourists, though."

"The regulars, is Leo Stack one of 'em?"

Jablonski frowned, pursed his lips. "How'd you know that, Hubert?" There was a note of surprise, even something bordering on respect, in his voice.

The chief drew himself up to his full height, looked over both shoulders conspiratorially, and lowering his voice said, "Don't know if I should tell you this or not, Jab, but Leo Stack and Darcy had been having their troubles lately."

"Humph! Everybody in town knows that, Hubert, it's not some big secret. Problem over that land deal they went in on together up at the north end of the lake. Now don't tell me from just that and this here tobacco you've got Leo Stack pegged as the murderer?"

"More than that," Turner said defensively. "Leo, or somebody who looked a lot like him, was seen leaving here about ten last night. Madder'n hell and in a hurry, too."

"That's it? No real evidence? Humph!"

"Don't make light of it, Jab," Turner said aggrievedly. "I've

got it all figured out. Just needed you to identify the tobacco to be sure it really was Leo who was here."

"What about those cigarette butts? Looks to me like somebody else was here, too."

The chief's head wagged back and forth. "Nope. Everybody knows Leo smokes cigarettes, too, not just a pipe."

"Well you're right about that much, at least," Jablonski admitted.

Smugly, Turner said, "Way I figure it, Leo started out smoking his pipe but got all excited and switched to cigarettes. That's why hardly any of the pipe tobacco's burned. Left his cigarettes and matches there on the table, too, when he rushed out."

Jablonski bent over again and examined the book of paper matches. The cover, imprinted with the name of Stack's real estate firm, had been left open and half of the matches were missing.

"Don't touch 'em, Jab," Turner cautioned.

"Think I'm that stupid?" Jablonski snapped. He took a pipe nail from his pocket and used it to carefully turn over each butt in the ashtray. After a moment or two he said, "Humph!" Satisfied, he straightened up, flexed his legs several times and asked:

"Where'd the gun come from, Hubert?"

"It's Darcy's. Old Minnie, his

housekeeper — she found the body when she came in this morning — says he kept it in that desk over there."

"That why you thought it might be suicide?"

"That and the gun being in his hand, but I never really thought he did it himself. Leo stuck the gun in his hand to make it look that way. Didn't fool me at all."

"How you figure Leo knew the gun was in the desk?"

The chief shrugged his shoulders. "Probably saw it sometime when Darcy opened the drawer."

"So what now? Going to arrest, Leo?"

"Yep. I'd like to have it wrapped up before I call in the state police. Course I'll let Leo tell his side of it if he wants to."

"That might be a good idea," Jablonski said sarcastically. Without the sarcasm he asked, "Going to arrest whoever else was here last night, too?"

"You talking about those butts again, Jab? I told you, everybody knows Leo smokes cigarettes."

"Everybody see him wearing lipstick while he smoked one?"

Turner, puzzled, said, "What are you talking about?"

"Take a close look. One of those butts has a trace of lipstick on it."

The chief knelt beside the table, his nose an inch from the ashtray. "Well I'll be darned," he said. "It looks like lipstick, all right. Just a touch, didn't notice it before."

"Now look at the matches."

Turner moved his head, squinted at the matches, finally said, "What about 'em?"

Jablonski shook his head in aggravation. "Look close, Hubert. Look how they're torn out. It's the oldest twist in detective stories, you read about it all the time. Half are torn off the right side but one's torn off the left."

The chief turned back to the matches and murmured, nodding his head at the same time, "Yeah, I see what you mean. One must have been pulled out by a left-handed person."

"Right Hubert, and one cigarette was smoked by a woman. Seems like a reasonable assumption that a left-handed woman smoked the last cigarette."

Turner, with several grunts and a long groan, got back on his feet. Scratching the back of his head he said, "I hear Mervin broke up with Jenny Palmer. Guess I'd better talk to her, too."

Jablonski walked to the desk, pulled out the chair and sat down front-to-rear so his legs straddled the back. "Sit down a minute, Hubert," he said, "and let's talk about it."

Turner hesitated a moment before easing his bulky frame into a chair well away from the body. "Okay, Jab," he said without enthusiasm. "Seems to me this is kind of out of your line, though."

"That makes two of us, then. But anyway, Hubert, a lot of people besides Leo Stacks didn't care too much for old Mervin there, me included. Like you say, there was Jenny because of the engagement. Garland Gant, too. Just yesterday Mervin demands a full refund on the ring he bought months ago. Then there's Hazel Miniver."

"Hazel Miniver? How's she fit in?"

"Hear she and Mervin had been going together. Maybe she was expecting that ring when he got it back from Jenny."

Turner shook his head. "Jenny seems more likely to me. Understand she took off the ring and threw it at Mervin when she ran into him at the country club. Maybe she came down here last night to try to make up with him. Probably knew where he kept the gun so when it didn't work out, she got it and shot him."

"Not likely," Jablonski argued. "Too proud to come begging. Besides, Mervin would have been on guard, knowing her temper and all. Look how relaxed he was sitting there, legs crossed, smoking his pipe. Same thing if it had been Leo. If they were really having it out, Mervin wouldn't have been so easy in his mind. Especially if Leo, or Jenny for that matter, was fooling around over at the desk where the gun was."

"I don't know, Jab," Turner

said doubtfully.

"Now Hubert, you know how Mervin liked to play cat and mouse with people. Always playing the role of the big man. Maybe he led Hazel Miniver on, let her think she was going to get that ring. Can't you imagine how she'd have looked forward to showing it around, lording it over Jenny? So suppose she came here expecting to get it and then found out he'd taken it back to the store. Probably knew where the gun was kept, too. Mervin was just sitting there enjoying himself, watching her stew, so finally she blew her stack, pulled out the gun before he realized what she was doing and shot him. Then she panicked, stuck the gun in his hand and ran out."

The chief sat quietly, his face blank, eyes fixed on the books across the room. Several minutes passed before he returned to Jablonski and said, "Could be, I guess. Maybe I'd better talk to Hazel first of all."

"Good idea, Hubert. Be interesting to see if she's left-handed. State police might match up the lipstick, too. Course I could be wrong, but it's worth looking into, I'd say."

Jablonski was hanging up his coat after returning from lunch when the chief entered the shop. Turner had changed from baggy trousers and a frayed jacket into his best uniform. He swaggered past the counter, chest out, stom-

ach in. Jablonski stared at him, frowning. The man seemed transformed, a confident figure of authority.

"Thought you should be the first to know, Jab," he said. "We were dead right. Hazel Miniver broke down two minutes after I got to her place. Admitted everything. Happened just the way we figured except the gun was already out on top of the desk. Mervin and Leo must have really been having it out before she got there and Mervin finally ran him off with the gun. Hazel said she wouldn't have known it was there otherwise."

"Is she left-handed?" Jablonski asked.

"Forgot to find out. I'll do that,

though. I called in the boys from the state to wrap things up. It makes me look pretty good, having Hazel in jail before I brought them into it. I might not have been able to do it as quick as I did without your help, Jab, so I wanted to thank you."

"Humph!" Jablonski took the pipe from his mouth, banged it roughly against the edge of a metal ashtray in the manner of Mervin Darcy.

"Nothing to thank me for, Hubert. Just protecting my business. Lost one regular customer thanks to this mess so I wasn't about to let you lock up Leo Stack and take another away from me. No sir, not right at the start of the slow season."

STRANGE, BUT TRUE

The only time the celebrated French attorney, Paree Maison, lost a case was when a ship on which he was a passenger struck an iceberg in the North Sea. "I had a case of champagne on board," Maison told reporters later, "and I lost it."

One of the foreign reporters, a former Nazi with no sense of humor and a violent temper, was so incensed by the remark he immediately assaulted the attorney, cracking forty or fifty of his victim's bones before being pulled off.

When the reporter went to trial, Maison left his hospital bed and volunteered to defend the man, since no competent lawyer wished to take the case. Maison's was a pitiful figure as he hobbled around the courtroom in his splints and bandages, eloquently arguing for compassion for the defendant. Despite his pleas, however, the jury brought in a verdict of guilty, and the offender was sentenced to twenty years at hard labor on Devil's Island.

When someone pointed out that this was a case he did not win, Paree Maison smiled enigmatically and said, "But what makes you think I lost?"

Just One More

by Edward D. Hoch

Art Mueller was an animal photographer, and a good one. But asking him to take a picture of a werewolf was going too far!

ONCE HE HAD THE LIGHTS just right, Art Mueller checked the art director's layout one last time. Then he moved quickly with the small motorized camera, snapping pictures with the speed and efficiency of a top fashion photographer.

"That's it! Look this way, Look this way! One more, one more!"

Mueller always talked while he worked, even though his subjects rarely paid attention. He'd convinced himself long ago that the sound of his voice was soothing to his models. Whether or not that was true, his constant motion and talking never failed to impress the visiting art directors who paid the bills.

"Think you've got enough?" Jeanne asked. She was his assistant, handling everything from accounting to darkroom chores. Occasionally she slept with Mueller too, but he didn't consider that one of her office duties.

"Maybe just one more. I'd like to move that dish a little to the left."

"That's not the way the layout

is," she told him.

"I know, I know." He turned to a gray-haired man standing behind the lights. "Felix, get the mutt's nose out of the dish for a minute, will you?"

Felix Trenton stepped forward, unsmiling. "I'd hardly call the highest-paid dog in the country a mutt, Art. Rainbow probably makes as much in a year as you do."

"But you keep the cash and he gets the dog biscuits — right, Felix?"

"What's wrong with that? I taught him everything he knows." He pulled Rainbow back from the dish of Frisky-Pups while Mueller bent to move it.

"Yeah, Felix. You're starting to look a little like him, you know? A bit long in the tooth."

The agency's art director, a tight little man named Jenkins, hurried over. "What's all this? Why are you moving the dish?"

"Get more light on the food. Make it look better."

"That's not the way my layout

shows it."

"Let's give it a try."

"They bought the ad from my layout, you know."

"Sure, sure." Mueller glanced over at Jeanne. "Get me another roll of film, will you?"

She opened the refrigerator door and took out a box, opening it as she brought it to him. He snapped it into the camera and closed the back. But the pause had made Rainbow restless and Trenton was having trouble with him. Mueller put down the camera. "Let me do it, Felix. I've got a way with animals."

The older man snorted and stepped aside. He was one of the best trainers around, but Mueller never credited him with much knowledge of what went on inside an animal's head.

"Settle down, boy! Settle down now! Just one more. I'm only going to take one more and then you can forget this crap and have some real bones. You'd like that, wouldn't you, boy?" He nuzzled the big furry dog for a moment and then released him, going back to his camera.

As he was about to start shooting he heard the bell on the studio door tinkle. "Damn! See who that is; will you, Jeanne?" Then he bent to his task. "All right, boy! Look this way! One more! That's it, that's it! One more!"

The art director sighed with relief when he'd finished. "Is that

it, Art?"

"That's it. I'll have a sheet of contact prints for you in the morning."

He unloaded the camera and placed the exposed film in Jeanne's darkroom tray for developing. Then he went out to see who their visitor was.

"Art, this gentleman wants to hire you if you're available."

Mueller looked the man over. He was middle-aged, with a neatly-trimmed beard and piercing eyes. Jeanne handed over a card that announced him as Professor John Hasty. Mueller tapped the card and said, "I'm an animal photographer, you understand. Mainly commercial work for ad agencies and such."

"I know you're an animal photographer," Professor Hasty said. "That's why I've come to you."

"What sort of animal would you like me to photograph?"

The bearded man hesitated and then said, "A werewolf."

"Oh, come on now!"

"I'm quite serious."

Mueller turned back to Jeanne. "Help them pack up their dog food, will you? I'll speak with the Professor in my office." He led the way into the cork-lined room where he could be surrounded by blow-ups of dogs and cats and horses. Behind the desk, over his chair, there was even his favorite picture of an elephant standing on the roof of a little imported car.

"Very impressive." Hasty said. "Your reputation is well deserved."

"Not a werewolf among them, you'll notice."

"I wouldn't be too sure about that, Mr. Mueller."

"Oh?"

"That's exactly why I've come to you. I've devoted most of my adult life to a study of lycanthropy in all its guises. I can tell you that werewolves *do* exist!"

"I'm sure," Mueller responded, already growing bored with the bearded man.

"But they have not been fully understood until now. Humans are not the only species capable of transforming themselves into wolves. I believe that certain forms of coyote, hyena and the like also have the power."

"Probably any animal with a y in its name," Mueller muttered.

"What?"

"Nothing. Go on."

"I also believe that the physical changes brought about during metamorphosis may be visible in their early stages — visible to the camera, if not to the naked eye."

"Look," Mueller interrupted. "I've given you enough of my time. Exactly what do you want me to do?"

"Please be patient. I can sense you're skeptical."

"You might say that."

"Animals are instinctive creatures — far more so than humans. When I'm near a creature capable

of changing into a werewolf, the metamorphosis often begins in its early stages before the animal can control it. The teeth grow longer, the ears more pointed. The process is usually arrested before becoming noticeable, but a skilled photographer could capture it on film. I'd like to begin out at the Bronx zoo, visiting the cages while you snap away."

"You don't need me for this. Take along an Instamatic or a Polaroid and do it yourself."

"I've tried that," Professor Hasty insisted. "The pictures aren't sharp enough, or close enough. I need a professional photographer using a telephoto lens to get me a closeup of the animal's head."

"Sorry, I'm not your man."

"I have research funds available —"

"Sorry."

"Will you at least think about it?" He seemed to be almost pleading. "Could I phone you tomorrow?"

"You can phone me if you want, but I doubt if I'll change my mind."

"Think about it. That's all I ask. One photograph — the right photograph — could make us both famous."

Mueller saw him to the door. "If they can sense you're after them, you'd better watch your step, Professor."

"I have been. I never leave the house unarmed."

Mueller closed the door behind his visitor and shook his head. One never knew what was coming next. He walked back into the studio and saw that the agency people were gone. Felix Trenton had the leash on Rainbow and was leading him out. He smiled when he saw Mueller.

"Did I hear that man say he wanted you to photograph werewolves?"

"You heard right. Damned crazy world."

"You get them all." Trenton tugged on Rainbow's leash. "Shake hands with Art and thank him like a good dog."

Mueller smiled as he accepted Rainbow's paw and arf. "Good boy. Give him an extra bone tonight, Felix, from your bank account."

After they'd gone, Mueller went in search of Jeanne. She was just coming out of the darkroom. "Can you make the contact prints tonight, Art? I've got a heavy date."

"Someone besides me?"

"Are you kidding? This is a guy who doesn't want to take pictures of me in bed."

He swatted her rear. "Go on. I'll finish up here."

When he was alone, he switched the telephone to the answering machine and went into the darkroom. Before long he'd printed two sheets of the contacts and they looked good. That damned dog was a real star!

He was especially interested in the last set of pictures, using the camera angle he'd devised, with the food dish up front. The Frisky-Pups looked better, all right, but for some reason Rainbow wasn't quite so photogenic.

He put them under the magnifier to look closer.

Odd.

Why did his teeth look longer in those final pictures?

And his ears —

Then he remembered what had happened while he was shooting those last photos. Professor Hasty had entered the studio. It wasn't possible, was it?

Was it?

He heard the tinkle of the bell again and knew that someone had entered the studio. "Who is it?" he called out from the darkroom door. When no one answered he sighed and started out to the office.

That was when he saw Rainbow. Rainbow, the highest-paid dog in America.

Rainbow, who could turn a door-knob with his teeth.

But he was different now — larger, uglier.

Mueller felt his heart thudding as he made for the extra camera on his filing cabinet. If he could get a picture of this —

"Down boy! Down! One more picture! Just one more!"

His fingers reached the camera in the same instant that Rainbow's jaws reached his throat. ●

Conduct Unbecoming

by Sean McMartin

He went down into the cellar, but he was up again in minutes, a cigarette hanging from his lips, sleeves rolled up to reveal muscular, hairy arms. He watched her, his eyes like beetles floating in milk. She wondered why he had brought that big, ugly box with him!

IKE CAMPBELL is a detective third grade on the Cranfield police force on which I, Jack Laverty, am Chief of Investigations and Campbell's superior. Campbell is black; I am white. I am not going to kill Campbell because he is black. I am going to kill him for conduct unbecoming a policeman.

I'll never know for damned sure where it all started. Maybe it was the hanging of that obscene Black Liberation Flag in a town that is old money and old ancestors, a town that reveres Walt Disney, the *Wall Street Journal* and a God whose whiteness is second only to His cleanliness. Maybe it was the burglaries. There have been five

of them, jewelry and money in small quantities from the more modest homes over the past month. None of the loot had turned up in any of the pawnshops around.

The flag, drooping from the pole in front of the Municipal Building like an old poncho worn while taking the garbage out in the rain, was black with a narrow red band at one end and a green one at the other. It had been discovered by a Public Works employee whose job it was every morning to put up Old Glory. The pulley was obstructed in some way, so we had to get the fire ladders with their cherry picker to haul it down.

They hooted with glee at us until I reminded them that our salaries were higher than theirs. That always curdles their milk.

I was wishing the damned day would take off for Cleveland when Barney McLoskey, our beloved Chief and a one-time legend in the New York Department, shot into the office as though someone had sprayed the bag in his pants with lighter fluid and ignited it. He is a tough gink, built like a tall jockey and, except for a fringe of pinkish grey gorse, as bald as a bar of used soap. He heisted his pants with the inside of his forearms like early Jimmy Cagney, then collapsed like a bundle of dirty grey sweatsocks into a metal side chair. His big eyes, wet rings made by a shot glass on a bar, were sad.

"What about that flag?"

The voice was pure Brooklyn, Red Hook out of Canarsie, forty years of Dazzy Vance, Cookie Lavagetto and last place.

"Let's wait and see who salutes it," I said wittily.

Lucky he wasn't listening. He flung himself around on the chair in a mad woman's gayotte.

"I retire in about eight months," he said, his voice taking on the whine of his September years. "I'd like to leave this Disneyland with some distinction, take the Goddamned gold watch, go down to Florida and raise Siamese cats. Now this."

I couldn't block out the thought

that when he did retire I'd love to take his place. My venality gave me a twinge of self hate, which I promptly transferred to McLoskey.

"Chief, darlin', show me a man who raises Siamese cats and I'll show you a queer."

It went right by him.

"Campbell's due in," I said, feeling sorry for the old spalpeen. "He's been rechecking the data on the burglaries. You remember he took over the assignment from Bert Haas. I'll get him to look into the flag bit."

McLoskey hauled himself out of the chair and went into another conniption.

"That's another thing, those four friggin' burglaries. The mayor thinks my butt is a teething ring. When in hell you gonna bust them?"

"Very soon, I think. I'm lighting candles to J. Edgar Hoover for our intentions."

"What did I ever do to deserve a wit like you?" McLoskey moaned.

"I'm the son you never had."

"I'm the boss you *got*," he yelled, hiked up his pants and staggered out the door.

Campbell strolled in half an hour later. He is a young buck, educated, articulate, not bad looking and snotty as hell.

"You pick up anything new?"

He shook his Afro no more than an inch or two.

"Teenagers, most likely."

"Why?"

The dark eyes were expressionless in the walnut face.

"Small items, stuff more valuable left behind."

"Any rock albums, candy, beer, birth control pills taken?"

"No."

"Teenagers would have. You go over the stories with the victims?"

He nodded.

"Refresh my memory," I snapped.

"Guy named Hofritz on Spruce," he said in a modified Gregorian chant. "Ninety-five bucks, his wife's diamond-studded watch, a sapphire ring and a gold cigarette lighter. He wanted to know why we didn't stick to one detective, what the hell was this, on-the-job training? Said if he didn't get fast action, he'd see the mayor personally."

"Screw Hofritz. Who else?"

He ran through the others. Nothing markedly different from the Hofritz job. Watches, rings, pins, cash. A Goddamned rut.

"You check the times?"

"Three during the day while the women were shopping, taking the kids to school or going to the library. One at night when the woman was visiting her sister."

"Any of the locks forced?"

"No. They all admitted they might have left the doors open."

Campbell looked uncertain. "Something bugs me about these jobs..."

"Me, too," I snapped. "They're unsolved, so get your ass in gear."

He stretched to his full height like a Watusi warrior rising out of the bush, spear, feathers, streaks of Impala dung on the face, the whole bit.

"One more thing," I said, holding up a traffic cop's hand. "You hear about the black flag?"

"I heard."

"Any ideas?"

"Any color," he said with quiet disrespect.

"Nose around. You hear anything, remember, you're a cop first and a black second."

"Am I off the burglaries?"

"Both," I said. "It won't choke you."

He gave me one more switchblade look and left with his butt high. I should have explained that I was out of sorts because I had been trying unsuccessfully to reach my daughter, Julie, for days. She's in social work, most of it in Newark's Inner City, and it worries me. Ah, why the hell should I explain myself to Campbell? I felt a lot better when toward the end of the day Julie's voice came over the wire like someone out of the dear dead days beyond recall.

"Where you been, child?" I barked. "I've been wearing out the phone."

There was a hiss of breath. She resents being called "child" at twenty-one, that towering age.

"Been playing with my Betsy Wetsy doll."

I chuckled. "Point taken. You okay?"

"Sure. Just busy. I see by the afternoon papers that Cranfield might be trashed."

"You mean the black flag? Not likely." I turned something over in my mind. "You know the young people here, Julie, probably better than I do. There a high percentage of militant blacks?"

That hiss again. "Look, Pop, I'm no police informer."

I throttled down my Irish temper. I have always tried to speak to her from the bottomless well of wisdom handed out like cigars at the birth of a child. Never works. Two pauses, one each.

"When am I going to see you?"

"I'll be by some time this week if I can get away from the grind."

That was it. Why can't kids remain kids? There are too damned many adults already. The black flag kept getting into my short hairs. Sending Campbell out on it was a little like sending John Mitchell to investigate corruption among the White House staff.

I jumped into my car and headed for Sparrow Hill, a two block area on the leading edge of the South Side. The houses on the Hill are small and unpretentious. No metal deer prance, no stone lions crouch, no plastic ducks waddle across the neat, crabgrass lawns. I parked the

car in front of the tiny barber shop on the corner. A squat black with a shiny bald dome seated in the chair nearer the door lowered his paper and glared at me. There was a gold tooth in the center of his mouth.

"God save all here," I said.

"Up yours, you Irish pig," the barber said in a voice like a bowling strike. "You want your hair done corn row? If not, beat it."

I flopped into the second chair. A photograph of a young, scowling negro in a baseball uniform was centered on the long mirror. Across the bottom of it were the words, "To Doug Coombs — Regards, Jackie Robinson."

"Bobby Richardson of the Yanks had a better glove," I said.

Coombs gave me a disgusted look.

"I need answers," I said. "Do I get them nicely or do I beat your black ass with a lead pipe?"

Coombs joyfully flung down the paper.

"Man, you are uptight about that black flag."

"Just curious."

He smiled the expensive smile of the gold-toothed man. I had known Doug for thirty-five years, first in The Bronx where we had grown up, lost track of each other, then in Cranfield, the mecca of nomadic ex-New Yorkers. Two years ago he'd run for mayor. He

got maybe one white vote — mine.

“You got your mind made up it was blacks,” Coombs snapped.

“You racist swine.”

“I do?”

“I could jive the hell out of you.”

“Wasn’t blacks?”

“Who said?”

“Make up your tiny mind.”

The grin became wider and more terrible in that black face.

“Cranfield,” he said, “doesn’t even exist. The *Ladies’ Home Journal* wrote the place. Let in enough Jews to run the stores, enough Irish to run the police and firemen and a few Toms in the good neighborhoods to fake out the Civil Rights Acts. Brothers hang a black flag, they come from Newark or Plainfield, blow off a little steam, maybe, bust a few windows, steal a 220-volt rotisserie. Cranfield’s blacks? Hell, ghosts of old Revolutionary War heroes gonna get ’em. You know us superstitious niggers.”

I waited through the ritual doubletalk with my eyes closed.

“Me Tarzan,” I said. “You Stepin Fetchit.”

“Who you got on the investigation, Jocko, old hardass Campbell?”

“You don’t like Campbell?”

“Honky philosophy. All blacks gotta like all blacks. Maybe he hung the flag.”

“No. Campbell’s a good cop.”

“Highest damned praise,”

Campbell jeered. His eyes drifted up and away. “I used to live on Washington Avenue, remember? Kid named Robert Lynch, little kinky-haired pickaninny with half his teeth missing, always smiling happy as a pig in slop, wanders into white territory one day. They pick him up by his ankles and swing him in circles, closer and closer to a fire hydrant until pretty soon they bust his kinky little head wide open. All he did was be black.”

“What’s that got to do with the price of sheep dip?”

“Just sorting out my values,” Coombs said. “Keeping things in perspective in case I be tempted to turn into an Uncle Tom. Hey, remember P.S. 28?”

“Who could forget?”

“You recall Miss Cusack, our eighth grade teacher?”

“Vividly. Cute little blonde, gave everyone stone aches.”

“Right on. You know something? I copped me a little feel.”

“You’re a liar.”

“In the cloakroom, sure ’nuff, right after class.”

“Hell, she’d have had your skin for a leather bag.”

“Man, she liked it fine. I got an A in Home Room that term.”

His laughter made the towels dance. He leaned forward. “Cranfield’s maybe got a problem, Jocko, but it ain’t a black one. Yet. Go talk to Newark, Plainfield. Dudes probably come from there.”

THINGS BEGAN TO POP next morning, although at the time I didn't regard the pops as sequential. I looked around for Campbell. Tim Sugrue, one of the other detectives, said, "He got a phone call and took off like he was spooked — you should pardon the expression."

My own phone rang. Mrs. Ralph A. Keene. Announced in a voice that hinted she was one of the country's leading hog callers.

"Yes, Mrs. Keene."

"Lieutenant, he's gone again."

He being Mike Danahey, seventy-six years old, a retired police sergeant from Staten Island, who for the past two years had been living like ten pounds of yeast in a five pound bag with his daughter. Every once in a while he'd take off for parts unknown. I always wound up, for some damned reason, looking for him personally.

"He let anything slip about where he might be heading?"

"No. He just read the paper, went to his room and next thing I know he's gone."

I drove slowly around town trying to figure out where I would go if I were seventy-six, lonely and dying memory by memory. Once I had found him halfway to Westonberg, staggering along Route 22 like an old wino. A cop had been killed breaking up a Supermarket break-in and Dana-

hey had gone to offer his services. I recapitulated. Danahey had read the paper, gone to his room, then disappeared. The biggest item in the paper had been the black flag story. Sugrue had said of Campbell, *Took off like he was spooked.* I made a U-turn on Brandywine.

There was a crowd in front of the Haight Street playground. A police cruiser was parked across the street and I recognized Campbell's head jutting over the others. Backed up against the anchor fence was Danahey. Despite the mild weather an overcoat hung around his thin shoulders like a cape, and his grey felt hat could have fit him twice. His face, scorched and frozen by too many seasons, was a sack of wrinkles held together by centripetal force. Only his eyes were ageless. Cop's eyes; cold as Arctic ice in their lumps of tired flesh. The voice came out of his scrawny body like an old wax cylinder recording of Thomas Alva Edison's.

"Le's go, ya jigaboos. Come one, come all."

He held his arms away from his body, left hand like a dinky little sparrow darting this way and that. In his right fist was the short, lead-filled, brown-stained oak nightstick with a rawhide thong that had been favored by cops back in the old days. Nobody moved.

"Police officer," Campbell shouted.

I picked my way through the seething crowd. Campbell started to close in.

I yelled, "Hold it, Campbell."

His head jerked around, eyes hot, big lips pulled back to show his teeth.

"Sergeant Danahey," I belled. "Drop the billy."

The stick dropped to the ground. Danahey straightened up, spotted me and threw a mean highball. I saluted back gravely, picked up the billy and turned to Campbell.

"Break up this crowd."

He started to say something, spun round and barked orders. The crowd began drifting away, muttering, spitting on the ground at Campbell's feet.

"They was gonna take over, Lieutenant," Danahey said passionately. "As a police officer it was my sworn duty."

"Come on," I said, grabbing the pipestem arm, "I'm taking you home."

Campbell came over and plunked himself spreadlegged in front of us.

"That man is my prisoner," he said in a voice that trembled. "Disturbing the peace, resisting arrest . . ."

"Let go of it, Campbell."

He stared at me with blazing eyes, cursed, spun around and walked away. I led Danahey to the car. Doug Coombs stood in the doorway of his shop, shoulders shaking, mouth split in a wide

grin. The thin sunlight turned the maverick tooth silver.

"Why don't you whites go back where you came from?" he yelled.

I gave him a stiff finger. In the car I said to the old man, "Sergeant, anything like this happens again, I'll turn you over to Detective Campbell back there. How will that look on your record?"

The old man stared straight ahead like a chicken mesmerized by a line drawn in the dirt. His daughter, a stout woman in a flowered print dress, was out on the brick stoop when the car pulled up in front of the split level. The old man got out like a slow motion movie and looked me right in the eye.

"You a good cop?"

"I'm a good cop."

"Then why ain't you out bustin' a few black heads before they bust yours?"

He danced a little jig, hands on hips, hat moving slowly down over his eyes. He shoved it back, winked and strode up the walk like a rookie on his first beat. His daughter nodded her thanks to me.

Then came the fifth burglary. The Sluthers on Forrest Street. In town only a week. I sent Campbell right over. Mc Loskey got hold of it before Campbell returned. I could only sit there, tasting bile, while McLoskey screamed and did an Irish step dance all over the room. In the middle of it, Julie peeked in, opened her mouth,

closed it and ducked out again. McLoskey finally ran out of vitriol. Forgot to hitch up his pants and stalked out with a droopy seat. Julie slipped back in and kissed me on the cheek.

"Wow, man, what'd you do?"

"Burgled a house."

"You?"

"Somebody."

She sat on the edge of the desk, a pretty girl with healthy nice eyes in which there was a grave expression. Damn, but she resembled her mom when Mary was alive and Hell was a'poppin.

"Chief McLoskey blame you, Pop?"

"He's scared stiff that when he retires he won't get his gold watch and a gooey cake and a funny Hallmark card signed by all his boys in blue."

"You still going to take his place when he retires?"

"At the moment," I said dully, "I'm not odds on."

"Heavy, Pop."

Campbell walked in. Julie waved.

"Hey, Ike."

"Hey," Campbell said with a tight grin.

"What've you got?" I barked.

Julie gave me another kiss, waved to Campbell and took off. Campbell gave me a quick, screw-you look.

"Same M.O.," he said. "Cash, a woman's watch, couple of pairs of gold earrings, a man's gold pen and pencil set."

We stared at each other, eyeball to eyeball. His eyes resembled gunsights and mine weren't dewy. I felt like kicking his because there was nobody else around and my foot itched.

"I've got an idea," he said.

I nodded to a chair, listened without saying anything and squinted skeptically at the brown face.

"Sounds screwy."

He shrugged his narrow shoulders.

"No skin off my ass."

His idea was well up into the wild blue yonder. If it failed, we'd both be up on charges of sedition, blasphemy and having carnal knowledge of kittens. Still . . .

"Okay," I said. "Arrange with Marty Kinder of Jamestown for a policewoman. Tell him no dogs. Remind him he owes me a favor."

Campbell stalked out without another word, thanks, nice to know you, you're a grand old flag, go to hell. Hell with *him*.

SHE DID NOT REFLECT the usual image of the hippy, undercover cop. Wearing bright yellow lounging pajamas, hair tied back with a matching yellow ribbon, she looked like a suburban lady of leisure whose husband has gone off to work and whose children are in school. She twisted the unfamiliar, gold-plated wedding band and the manufactured diamond that she was required to wear.

She had been awake since six. She had come to the sparsely furnished house, made calls from a list of numbers to have the utilities turned on, checked with the milkman and the scavenger for the area, contacted the telephone company to have a phone installed and stood around waiting. A man from the electric company came and went. The milkman arranged milk delivery. The bell rang for the third time. She spotted the Jamestown Gas Company truck with the small, blue flame insignia on the panel through the window.

"Morning, missus," the young man at the door said in a nice, throaty baritone. "Gas company." He smiled widely. "Like to check your meter."

There was a wink in his voice, something not so innocent in the remark. Stay loose was the order. Play along. Everything in the house was bugged. Help would be close by.

"Come in," she said, smiling sweetly, loose as a goose.

He was about six feet with broad shoulders and a springy, confident walk. His hair was dark blond, worn medium length in back and long, bushy sideburns. His green whipcord uniform might have been custom cut. He carried a square metal case like a lunch box.

"Nice place," he said, letting his eyes sweep around.

"Thanks," she said, trying to

hang on to her smile.

"Name's Pete Carroll," he said.

"Mrs. Shannon. Mary Shannon."

His glance went up and down her slowly. At the cellar door he turned.

"Might make a little noise," he said conspiratorially. "Hope it won't wake the mister."

"Oh, no, he left for work half an hour ago."

"Boy," he said. "Banker's hours. Work near here?"

"New York City," she said.

He went down into the cellar. She felt her knees start to jerk. He was up again in minutes, a cigarette hanging from his lips, sleeves rolled up to reveal muscular, hairy arms. He sat next to her on the sofa, the strong, masculine odor of perspiration and shaving lotion wafting over to her.

"Mary is a grand old name," he said.

She said, "Ummm."

His arms were around her, mouth hard against hers, tongue probing inside.

"Come on," he said huskily.

The bedroom looked like the primrose path, every square inch bristling with thorns. He started to unzip her pajamas.

"No," she said. "I'll do it."

She was naked in seconds, even with the stalling. Her breasts felt as big as watermelons. He was watching her, his eyes like beetles floating in milk. Why had

he brought that big, ugly box with him?

"Lie on the bed, honey," he said.

She lay down on her side, facing away from him.

"Nice and shy," he said. "On your back, please. Mary."

She caught the flash through her closed eyelids. He had a polaroid camera up to his face.

"Don't yell," he said. "I'm not looking for jazz, just negotiable stuff. That's a good girl."

She yanked her panties on and covered her breasts with one hand.

"Whatever you got around," he said, grinning. "Not your wedding ring, though." He raised the camera. "Polaroid, see, no negatives. I'll mail the print to you if you behave. That way you're safe. No more blackmail."

She got her purse. Forty-seven dollars in marked bills, the expensive gold watch her parents had given her one Christmas, the engagement ring, a topaz friendship ring. She sank down on the bed. The sounds of a scuffle at the front door came to her like background music to a nasty commercial.

THE NEXT MORNING I had a ten o'clock appointment with my dentist to have a loose tooth checked. Dr. Jonah Bloodstone, who fancies himself a folksinger with dentistry only a sideline, told me that the tooth would either

tighten up in time or fall out, in which case he would charge me a fortune for a partial. He sang the *Blue-Tailed Fly* while he peered into my mouth.

"That was Abe Lincoln's favorite song," he explained.

"It's not mine. Stop singing in my mouth."

"What would you rather I sang into your mouth? Just name it."

"Do you know what you're doing or are you just queer for open mouths?"

"Not yours, anyway. It looks like a Caesarian section on a whale."

I got back to the office to a scene of mild excitement.

"What's going on?"

"Haven't you heard?" Sugrue said. "Campbell just busted the burglaries."

He told me what had happened. I felt as though the weight of the Municipal Building had been lifted off my neck. Campbell's theory had been correct. In all the jobs the lady's watch had been taken. Every woman claimed to have been out when they took place. Women don't leave their wristwatches lying about when they go out, not all five at any rate. To Campbell that meant that they hadn't gone out. Since they lied, they must be hiding something. Like matinee jobs with the perpetrator. It's been known to happen with wives whose husbands aren't loving.

"Where's Campbell?" I said.

"I want to shake his hand. Oughta get him a commendation, maybe a detective, second."

"He got roughed up a little in the scuffle with Carroll," Sugrue said. "Signed out sick."

I remembered to call Marty Kiner to thank him for his help.

"What help, Jack?"

"The policewoman, Mary Shannon."

"We don't have any Mary Shannons in the department."

"Maybe she used an alias. Young girl, I hear, pretty."

"Couldn't be from here," Kiner said "Ours take ugly pills. I'm always complaining."

"Didn't Campbell get in touch with you about borrowing one of your girls?"

"Nope."

What the hell?

"Okay, Marty, thanks."

Julie walked in, her face looking the way it had when her report card hadn't been quite up to snuff and she knew Daddy would have to sign it.

"What's the matter, child, you get a B instead of an A in something?"

"Carroll is in jail," she said.

"That's points for you, right?"

"I guess."

She smiled, no more than a shift in her facial skin. "You've been sounding like the end of the world lately. I've been worried."

She kept fiddling with the handle on her bag, eyes down, mouth down, sad little sack.

Something hit me.

"How'd you know the perpetrator's name was Carroll?"

"Didn't Ike tell you?"

"Tell me what?"

She looked away. I felt ice cold suddenly, but my mind was blazing away.

"You? You weren't Mary Shannon?"

"Ike couldn't get a policewoman. He asked me if I'd do it. He said your job was in danger. I wanted to help."

I ran out to the car and roared off. Campbell lived on Haight in the Hill section. His mother, a small, grey-haired woman with gold-rimmed spectacles, answered the door.

"Your son home?"

She shook her head. Her eyes were great patches of white.

"I'm sorry, Lieutenant. I don't know where Ike is."

I drove off. I was held up on Enfield Avenue by traffic detoured off the main drag by street repairs. I parked and got out. It would be faster on foot. I finally spotted Campbell two blocks away but by the time I dodged through traffic he had disappeared. I grabbed an elderly man by the arm.

"Police. You see a tall, skinny, colored man? Afro hair."

He gestured north on Enfield. "That way. You after him for rape or something?"

I ran over the bridge, past the Canoe Club. If he had spotted me,

he would head for Nohami Park. I forced myself to move faster, sobbing, gulping quantities of air. I caught a glimpse of him crossing Casino Avenue. I had gained a block on him. I slanted through some lawns, past swing sets, behind barbecues, through patios, sliding along patches of mud where the owners were not so fastidious about lawns. When I came out on Henry I saw Campbell just entering the park through one of the foot trails. I pulled my gun. Warned by some instinct, Campbell whirled around.

"Campbell," I roared.

He scrambled through the underbrush. He was in the center of a small clearing when I broke through. I went down on one knee, right hand extended, left hand cupping it and yelled, "Halt!"

He turned for a fraction of a second. I fired. A branch snapped off a sycamore tree. Campbell ran into the trees. I struggled up, started to move forward and my foot caught on a vine and down I went, flat on my face. I staggered up, picked up the gun, holstered it, plodded around the lake and out onto Enfield. Campbell was nowhere in sight. He would head for the Hill. They would hide him till Hell changed into a popsicle.

Mrs. Campbell again answered my ring. She looked over my shoulder. I whirled in a half crouch and went for my gun. Doug Coombs stared at me.

"Let's go for a walk, Jocko."

"Go to hell."

Coombs grabbed my arm. "Come on, man."

I yanked my arm free. "You knew that sonofabitch was going to do this?"

"I heard."

"Everybody screw Whitey, right, man?"

"Don't go ape," Coombs said calmly. "I tried to reach you this morning."

I stalked up Haight. Short legged or not, Coombs never lost a step alongside me.

"You maniac, you took a shot at him."

I stopped. "How'd you know? You hiding him?"

"You better believe it."

"Turn him loose."

"No way. Too many brothers and sisters might get hurt."

I cursed. Coombs' gold tooth gleamed.

"You hired the Mother, Jocko."

"I'll sure unhire him — permanently."

Coombs stopped and leaned against a lamppost.

"Get your brains outa your butt and listen to me. Campbell resigns and you forget all about it."

"That'll be the Goddamned day. He suggest that?"

"Honky justice. Black man looks at a white girl's pretty and gets his black butt full of bullets. Where you from — Bull Conner, Alabama? No, he didn't suggest

it, I do. I'll even sweeten the pot. You accept his resignation, I tell you who hung the black flag."

"I couldn't make a deal if I wanted to," I said coldly. "And I don't want to. He's got to testify against Carroll and so does Julie and I have to watch that nice kid shame herself."

"Horseshit. The guy grabs a plea. You and your pet judges do it all the time. Carroll is white, that'll help."

I had privately been doubting an extortion charge would hold up. I didn't figure anybody would want a bunch of silly women dragged through mud for their silliness. Carroll would probably go up on a lesser charge.

"You talked to Campbell?" I snapped.

"I talked to him. He made a mistake. He's a proud dude, Jocko. You made him look poorly the other day in front of his people with that Danahey character. He used Julie to get even. Now he's scared green. Never been shot at before. Little Black Sambo with all those white tigers comin' after him."

"I shot to miss," I said.

"I know that."

He handed me a small envelope.

"What's that, a bribe?"

"The picture, you dumb Mick."

I shoved it into my pocket.

"You tell Campbell to write his resignation, date it today and mail it to me. If the prosecutor goes for a lesser plea, it'll be on its merits.

Tell Campbell, make him believe it, get his ass out of Cranfield. He doesn't, some dark night it gets shot full of holes and nobody knows a damned thing."

Coombs reached into his pocket, yanked out a .38 and a shield and handed them to me.

"Campbell's," he said. "I got your word, Jocko?"

"You got it. Now who hung that damned flag?"

He grinned that Godawful grin. "Me."

I swore up, down and cross-ways. "You're a liar."

"Smile when you say that, pig. 'S truth. I was afraid I was turning white by association, hadda do something to reaffirm the blood."

"I'll haul you up on a charge of malicious mischief."

He shrugged.

He was lying right through his gold tooth, but he'd risk going to jail for a couple of months, maybe, just to keep a bargain. I knew the guy. What the hell. Cranfield would eventually forget the flag. The Carroll bust would lull the citizenry into figuring it was a low crime area. We walked back to my car. The rage was gone, not the pain, but I could think reasonably straight. Couldn't let it all go like this, old things still went a long way.

"You really cop a feel off Cusack, Doug?"

He grabbed his crotch and rolled his eyes.

I grinned. "Black bastard." ●

PATTERNS

by Dan J. Marlowe

The dean of the college was an unusual woman — but she had some even more unusual students!

ALBERTA JARBOE AWOKE to the sound of the insistent ringing of the telephone on the nightstand beside her bed. Eyes still closed, she reached for it unerringly. She was no stranger to late-night phone calls.

"Jarboe," she said.

"This is McDevitt, Dean Jarboe," the faintly metallic voice on the telephone said. "We had a mugging on campus tonight."

Hugh McDevitt was the university's security chief. "Male or female?" Alberta Jarboe asked quickly.

"Male."

A small blessing. Be thankful, she urged herself. "Is it bad?"

"It doesn't seem to be. He has a knot on his head. I took him to Grace Hospital as a precaution. I'm still at the hospital."

"I'll meet you there."

Alberta Jarboe, dean of the

university's engineering school, slid from bed and began to dress. Her husband, Ralph, who had his own business consultancy, rolled over, yawned, peered at the bedside clock, then grimaced. "Another fraternity ruckus?" he asked sleepily.

"A mugging."

His head came up from the pillow. "On campus?"

"Yes. We were saying at the last faculty meeting that we'd been lucky. That we couldn't expect the distance from the center of town to insulate us forever."

"You don't have to take these watchman-what-of-the-night? pre-dawn runs," he grumbled.

"It's because I don't have to that I do it," she said briskly, moving toward the bedroom door. "I probably won't be back for breakfast."

She drove rapidly to Grace Hospital. Security Chief McDevitt, a burly man, met her in the lobby. "They say the kid's okay," he reported. "But they're keeping him overnight."

"Did you talk to him, Hugh?"

"Yeah, before they sedated him. He didn't see a thing. He was walking on the ellipse at midnight when he was belted over the head from behind." Many of the engineering students parked their cars around the ellipse at night. "His wallet was missing, of course."

"Who is the boy?"

"James Alexander."

Dean Jarboe ran through a mental card file. Alexander, James. Engineering major. Father a lawyer. Hmmm, a possible complication there. "You reported it to the police, Hugh?"

"Sure. They're out at the school now thumping around with my men. In a situation like that, though, if you don't get the creep in the first fifteen minutes, you probably don't get him at all."

"I know you're doing all you can, Hugh. I'll speak to the desk here and then get over to the school. Keep me informed, please. Alexander's father will feel better about it if we can report the capture of the mugger."

The girl at the hospital desk confirmed that X-rays projected no apparent complications for young James Alexander. Alberta decided that, lacking an emergency, she would await a more reasonable hour before informing Lawyer Alexander about his offspring. She drove to the school, parked in her slot in front of the Engineering Building, nodded to the guard at his desk inside the entrance, and unlocked the door to her own office.

She made herself a cup of instant coffee before going to her secretary's file and pulling the card on James Alexander. She made a note of the family's home phone number before she replaced the card in the file. She sat down at her desk and leafed through the

topmost of a stack of engineering magazines on one corner of her desk. University routine left her with little time to look at them during the day.

She continued reading until daylight began to filter through her office window. She rose, stretched, and went to the window. A figure in a fire-engine red jogging suit caught her eye. Although a hood covered his head, Alberta had no difficulty in recognizing the lithe stride and feminine jiggle of Senhorita Graciela de Pinho Vassallo of Brazil, the school's No. 1 engineering student. A sound mind in a sound body, Alberta reflected. There was no question about the mind, and the observable body left little to question, either.

She drove back to the hospital and looked in upon James Alexander. The boy recognized her and smiled groggily. She waved to him, then went out into the corridor to find a pay phone to call the boy's home.

She made her report in half a dozen crisp sentences, minimizing nothing. Young Alexander's father proved to be a reasonable man despite the fact he was a lawyer. She was able to close the conversation with the assurance that no immediate visit was necessary and that she herself would remain in contact with Alexander senior.

Alberta returned to school and the daily whirligig. She was proud

of the fact that she was a department head in a school with more than 40,000 students, just as she was proud of the fact that in regional and national meetings of engineering deans she was the only woman. Ralph was always protesting the fact that she gave 125% to the job, but Alberta felt she had something to prove.

During the morning she spoke to the city's chief of police and was assured that everything possible was being done. She had missed breakfast altogether. Her secretary called the school cafeteria to send over a grilled cheese sandwich and a glass of milk. Alberta was debating the possibility of slipping home for a couple of hours to take a nap when the secretary appeared in the doorway. "Walter Conway wants to know if you have a moment to see him," the girl said.

Conway, Walter. The name had no immediate connotation for Dean Jarboe, which was a good sign. With rare exceptions, if she knew the students well, it was for the wrong reasons. "Tell him to come in," she said.

Walter Conway proved to be a tall, blond, goodlooking young man. He seated himself in the chair to which Dean Jarboe waved him. The dean prepared herself to listen as she always listened to students: a part of her mind focused upon what was being said, but the greater part upon the manner in which it was being said.

Young Conway came to the point immediately. "I might be able to help with that mugging last night, ma'am."

"Indeed? The police would certainly be pleased if you could. We all would. How do you feel you can help?"

"Well, ma'am, I take a walk around the ellipse each night around midnight. To — to sort of cool down the brainpan before bedtime. I look at the cars parked as I pass them. I look at the license plates, I mean."

Dean Jarboe nodded encouragingly as Conway paused. "You look at the license plates," she repeated. "You don't mean you remember them? Some nights there must be sixty cars parked around the ellipse."

"Last night there were forty-eight, ma'am. I have a list." He fumbled it free from a jacket pocket. "It's a memory quirk, I guess."

Dean Jarboe considered what she had heard. The facts had been presented forthrightly. The delivery, though, had imprinted a warning blip upon the radar screen of her receptivity. The delivery had definitely been without the ringing resonance of truth incarnate.

"I thought —" Walter Conway hesitated, then continued, " — I thought if the police checked the list of license numbers they'd know — they could tell if any of the cars belonged to someone who

shouldn't have been there."

Dean Jarboe reached for her telephone. "I'll arrange for you to deliver this information directly to the police," she said. "We can hope it's what they need to find the mugger."

She spoke to the police chief again, then watched thoughtfully as Walter Conway left her office. Something was wrong with Conway's story, but that didn't mean she had time to do anything about it. Especially when the police would do it for her.

Which was why she was surprised to receive a phone call three hours later from a jubilant chief of police. "That's some kid you sent us, Dean. Forty-six of the cars were flat-out okay. One was there for a bit of romance, and the driver of the other is doing the canary bit for us right now. He's the mugger."

"Wonderful," Alberta murmured. She repeated it while the police chief ran through a few added praises for Walter Conway. She hung up her phone, leaned back in her chair, and stared up at the ceiling. She shook her head negatively several times with increasing emphasis.

She roused herself then and called Grace Hospital. When she was informed that James Alexander would be released that afternoon, she placed a call to Alexander senior and left word with his law secretary about that bit of good news.

She left her desk then and went into her secretary's office where she again pulled Walter Conway's card from the file. She studied it for a time, tugging absentmindedly at an earring. "Ask Conway to come back to my office, please," she said finally.

While she was waiting, she made a phone call to the head of the Physics Department. "Nippy," she said, "give me a run-down on your student, Walter Conway."

"An unusual mind," Niponset Russell responded cheerfully. "He thinks sideways. His lab experiments are bizarre but enormously creative. He's sent me back to the books a couple of times to keep up. He seemed to learn how to study a few months back, and his marks are up for the past two semesters."

"I noticed."

"Is something wrong?"

"No. No, I'm sure it's not. Thanks, Nippy."

Walter Conway re-entered Dean Jarboe's office with obvious reluctance. His attitude was defensively wary. "The chief of police called to say they have the mugger, thanks to you, Walter," Alberta began. "Only it isn't you they really have to thank, is it?"

"Ma'am?"

"You didn't supply the list of license numbers, Walter. You didn't remember them. Your high school transcript and your work here with us indicates plainly

that your forte is not in memorizing pages of figures but in reasoning through problems."

"I didn't — ahh, I didn't say I memorized the numbers, ma'am. I said I thought I could help."

"So you did. But that brings us to the individual who supplied the list, doesn't it? Thanks are due."

Walter Conway sighed audibly. "It was my roommate."

"Then I'd appreciate meeting your roommate to extend congratulations. Shall we say tomorrow?"

"Yes, ma'am."

BY THE FOLLOWING MORNING the press of everyday affairs had sidetracked the incident in Dean Jarboe's mind. Consequently, she was totally unsuspecting when her secretary told her that Senhorita Graciela Pinho de Vassallo wished to see her.

"Our beautiful Brazilian resident genius?" Alberta asked ruefully. She still bore only partially-healed psychic scars from past encounters with the brilliant Graciela. "Any idea what I've done recently to merit a visit from Graciela?"

"I'm afraid not."

"Oh, well, give me a moment and then send her in."

It was an added irritation to Alberta that feeling as she did about the girl she had mainly herself to blame for Graciela's presence in school. The luck of the

draw had assigned Graciela to Alberta for her admission interview. When Alberta pointed out that the Engineering School wasn't accustomed to admitting students already possessing an honors degree from Juilliard, Graciela had smiled and said that the degree in music was for her parents. The engineering degree would be for herself.

Graciela's English was perfect in a slightly oldfashioned way. Her transcript was impeccable, as was her personality. And her looks. Alberta's slightly dazzled male colleagues on the full Admissions Board had taken sixty seconds to admit her.

Alberta knew that one of the reasons she was Dean Jarboe was that she usually possessed an infallible nose for the student activist types who clogged up a school's administrative schedule. She had missed completely with Graciela. The girl during her first semester had organized the other women engineering students to appeal for equal time in the engineering swimming pool.

During their initial confrontation, Graciela coolly informed Alberta that the dean's interpretation of the federal government's Title IX program did not coincide with Graciela's. Alberta sent her to the university's counsel, who called Alberta two days later. "Surrender," the counsel advised curtly.

"Really? I didn't realize — I

guess Graciela's the type who will go after a law degree after we decorate her here."

"She doesn't need a law degree. She quoted me more case law on Title IX than I knew existed. Surrender, and save us all a headache."

So Alberta had surrendered, grudgingly. It had been small consolation that Graciela at once circulated a petition among the same women by which they agreed to accept pool time in proportion to their female percentage of the engineering student body. A defeat is a defeat: The girl was as clever as she was brilliant. Often the two were not the same. Graciela's instructors all agreed she had the type of mind which lifted a problem's answer from a manual and returned it intact to an examination paper except in better English. Graciela could memorize the spots on a leopard.

Good God!

Memorize!

Dean Jarboe found herself on her feet when Graciela entered the office. The girl spoke before the dean had time to reassemble her wildly scattered thoughts. "I'm Walter's roommate, of course, Dean Jarboe," she said.

"Of course," Alberta mumbled. She cleared her throat before attempting to rally. "On campus?" she asked sharply.

"Off campus. I have an apartment."

Alberta knew there was a

wealthy family in the girl's background. "Walter's card shows him still living on campus."

"A minor violation of campus regulations," Graciela said.

"We are not as liberal-minded here as some —"

"Dean Jarboe." Alberta paused at the interruption. "I do not wish to have you attempt to regulate a situation which I have been at some pains to establish."

Well, there's the gauntlet, Alberta thought. Again. She raised her voice deliberately. "Young lady, I'm afraid our rules —"

"Because if you do," Graciela continued, unheeding, "I will bring suit against the university for violation of my civil rights."

"Civil rights! What exactly —"

"But more importantly, I will guarantee you media coverage which will make you the butt of ridicule in every engineering journal in the country." Graciela softened the ultimatum with a dazzling smile which Alberta did not make the mistake of interpreting as a sign of weakness.

"You've heard of untenable positions, Graciela? I feel —"

"Dean Jarboe, I wouldn't have you think I constructed this situation wholly because of the submergence of Christian lady into female animal," Graciela said. "Walter is an unusual man. He will be a distinguished researcher, perhaps even an inventor. But he needs management, which I will

supply. I've already showed him how to manage his study time for better results." Graciela rose and moved toward the door. "I appreciate your cooperation."

Dean Jarboe discovered that she could avoid the rear heels of a mule as skillfully as anyone. "Thanks for your help with the mugger," she said.

Graciela turned to look over her shoulder. "Even that wasn't exactly as Walter reported it," she said.

"It wasn't?"

"No. When Walter and I leave the library nights where we study, we walk around the ellipse before we go to my apartment. To amuse myself, I look at the license plates and supply notes of the scale for the numbers. Then I add a key, perhaps C sharp tonight, perhaps B flat tomorrow night. So I have a melody."

Alberta Jarboe had taken piano lessons for seven years when she was a girl. "I should think it would result in endless dissonances," she said.

"There are no dissonances in modern music, Dean Jarboe. There are only patterns. When Walter told me about the mugging, I hummed the previous night's melody to myself while I translated the notes back into numbers. It was quite simple." Graciela waved to Alberta as she left the office.

"YOU CAN'T LET the animals

run the zoo, of course," Alberta said to her husband, Ralph, at dinner that evening after she had told him the story. "And I really was tempted to take the matter to the Administrative Board, if only to see the expressions on their stuffy faces."

"But you decided against it," Ralph said.

"Yes. Graciela would do everything she said she'd do, and in these times public opinion would be on her side. Or the vocal part of it would, which is what would concern the Administrative Board. And then — " Alberta paused while she helped herself to more meat loaf, the product of her mother's special recipe. "But more importantly, those two will

marry, and he will go back to Brazil with her. He will have his career, and she will have her man."

"Yes," Ralph agreed. "It's odd, but I recall a similar situation. There was a young graduate student with a teaching assistant's position who had a dream of creating his own business consultancy. And he was encouraged by the brightest and most beautiful of his female students who also — "

"You know perfectly well that had nothing at all to do with my decision today," Alberta said with dignity.

Husband and wife exchanged a husband-and-wife smile across the dinner table. ©

STRANGE, BUT TRUE

For those of you who really hate these strange but true fillers, here's instead a list of authors who might appear in future issues of MSMM: Thomas Jefferson, Suzanne Somers, William Shakespeare, Jackie Kennedy Onassis, Benjamin Franklin, Effie-Lou Keesiewetter, Franklin Delano Roosevelt, Snub Pollard, Benito Mussolini, Abbott and Costello, The Boy Scouts of America, Judge Crater, and Edward D. Hoch. Now don't say we can't be serious if we want to!

COLD GREEN LIGHT

by Moss Tadrack

He turned the key, walked into his room. No lights were on, but the drapes were open and enough light came from the street to show him around. He had no sense or feeling of anything being out of the way until he glanced at the chair by the window. Somebody was in it, somebody who sat quietly and waited. He felt the quick, icy chill in his throat!

COLD FRISCO RAIN coated Fifth Street with a black, slippery skin. At the corner of Mission, Police Sergeant Don Garrski, carrying an umbrella and wearing a beige coat and tan slacks, waited for the light to change and then plodded across. What a way to

spend a vacation! Not only had he stayed out until 3 A.M., but steam beer on top of Irish Coffee made him sick and irritable. His irritation increased when a tall thin goon charging out of nowhere knocked Don's portfolio to the wet sidewalk.

Earlier that night, dramatized by the black velvet showcase of the Bay, a diamond of light flashed in from Alcatraz. Nearer, around the periphery of Aquatic Park, gas lights glowed in the rain with a lemony, uncanny phosphorescence. A traffic light froze into a green cube of light. Don sensed a tremor along Anna-Maria's skin as he bent over her. Her lips burned.

"Hey, Man, where's your hotel room?"

It wasn't her fault. It wasn't his fault. Between him and her flowed, too sweet and too sour, the dregs of some horrible, previous, half-remembered love affair. Her white slacks, wet with rain, clung to her legs and thighs with no more concealment than cellophane gives a box of candy. Her Greek Goddess head stared at him. Her fluffy, outrageously funky green blouse was soaking wet. She had slung her pink suede jacket loosely over one shoulder.

He had wanted to. Oh, sure he had wanted to. All evening long, he had watched her and had sensed her febrile, tense excitement. One Irish Coffee after another had not helped him one bit. Upon emerging from the B.V., he knew nothing in the universe could keep him from sharing a night with her. And, yet, when she had pressed herself to him, a cold green light had crawled

across her face, and he had rejected her.

A door to a shoe shine stand stood ajar. In a final culmination of misery Don stopped and stared at it. A quick glance inside revealed a woman's body. He bent down, brushed bloody hair from a crushed skull, felt for a pulse. There was none.

It took Don less than seven seconds to make it back to the alley into which the tall thin man had scurried and disappeared. The sign said Jessie. In G-Town, he had no murders. Years before in Chi, he had given up on murders. Right now, Don's common sense told him to walk out on the whole case. As it was, acidly disgusted, he ripped the SFPD number out of the phone book and achieved an almost savage delight in stabbing his finger at the dialtone.

THE HOMICIDE INSPECTOR, Joe Moats, barely glanced at his badge. "Yeah, I see. So, you're a cop, right? A poor working slob like the rest of us. What brought you out here?"

A week before, Don's old deer hunting buddy, Gordon Sears, had talked him into a layover on his way to Hawaii. Which wasn't bad except Gordon's boss called him up to Anchorage on an investigation. Which was A-OK too, but before he'd gone and spurred by some weird sense of humor, Gordon had conned him

into appearing on Anna-Maria's morning talk show. Bay-Area crime being rampant, Anna-Maria was up to her pretty neck in surveys, in-depth-analyses, and statistics. Don had said a few words. Anna-Maria glibly gabbed. The usphot of it was she had talked him into exploring Frisco's seamy side with her.

"And . . . ?" Joe Moats peered at him speculatively through the rain.

"Yeah. Nothing. How many cable cars can you ride? How many Discos can you take?"

"You got a point. So a corpse shows up on your vacation. Tell me about it."

Don sketched his brief glimpse of the fleeing suspect. Being a cop, he had been compelled to walk in that open door. So what else was new? Joe Moats jotted down a few observations.

"Could you recognize him?"

Don considered. He'd been freezing. His feet had sucked a cold sound off the black sidewalk. His umbrella had blocked most of his vision, and he had not really seen the man at all. He had only the vaguest of impressions the man knew him. But to put features, ID, and a personality to that particular suspect would have taken a supreme act of Don's imagination. He was not about to give it.

"OK, then," Moats said. "One thing sure. She got herself mugged. Purse gone. Her assail-

ant used a blunt instrument. She's known around here. Quick Sue Barnes."

"Didn't look like a hooker to me."

"Not! Sixty-five. Got her name from the way she ran around snatching up aluminum cans. How she made herself extra bucks. Ever try to hang a murder rap on a mugger?"

Don couldn't restrain an immense shiver of wet and cold. "You going after him?"

"Routine. Nothing to it." Moats convulsed his lips into a parody of a smile. "Wanta guess how many we convict in a year's time?"

Don watched long bright knives of rain slash past the open door to the shoe shine stand. He knew only too well the failure rate in homicide. He shook rain from his black portfolio and looked glum. Why in hell was he lugging that damn thing anyway? And then he remembered Gordon telling him better keep a few facts handy for Anna-Maria's TV Show. Don made a tired, exhausted gesture. Joe Moats understood it immediately. "OK, beat it, fellow! We know where to find you. and thanks!"

Back in his hotel room on Sutter, Don threw off his wet jacket, his wet slacks, and stepped into the shower. He turned the spray on hot and waited until he saw his skin glowing beet red before adjusting the temperature a notch

lower. Fifteen minutes later he felt almost human. He poured himself half a glass of bourbon, added a touch of water and sat nursing it on the bed. A big mirror over the walnut dresser reflected a grey, pudgy individual who held a glass tilted loosely in one hand. A beige drape covered the windows. His white door stood across from the mirror. By then Don wasn't even thinking. All he did was sit and drink and listen to the rain.

It might have been an hour later. It might have been two. Somebody knocked, and Don, thinking it was Moats, bellowed for whoever was out there to come the hell in. Making some small pretense at modesty, he snugged his old blue bathrobe tighter about his waist. It was not any particular skill that kept him from turning to face the door, but rather a technique perfected in South of the Loop bars. He swept his eyes up and into the glass, and he watched the door pop open. A tall, thin man wearing a black raincoat and a stocking mask stepped in and quickly raised a gun with a silencer.

"Don Garrski?"

Don didn't answer. He spun away from the shot, but he didn't spin soon enough. A bullet whanged the side of his head and plunged him into darkness.

Much later, he tried moving his head and his fingers. To his surprise and sick amazement,

they moved. He was lying on his stomach on a brown closely woven carpet, staring under the bed at a few dozen dust kittys and somebody's discarded paperback. With difficulty he moved his legs. He tried fingering his head. A long struggle got his fingertips to the side of his head where he found a long crusty welt.

Don staggered to his feet and slowly made his way to the window. He pulled the drapes and stared down into a cold, rain-swept night. At the corner, a traffic light turned green and froze that way, coating the pavement with green, slick ice. The killer had spoken his name. That made it personal.

Don staggered back to his bed and sat down to look into the mirror. He saw his same blue bathrobe, his same pudgy grey body. Adding color, a red swatch sizzled hotly over his left ear. He was wondering about calling in and reporting the shooting, when he caught sight of his black portfolio. Suddenly its significance hit him hard, and he decided to keep the murder attempt to himself. After too many years, too many police forces, he trusted none.

He would ask Moats for one thing though. He put a call through to the Hall of Justice. "Can you run a print check for me?"

Moat's answer came back so slowly Don thought the Inspector

must be nursing a bad hangover.

"Yeah, why not? Got any ideas?"

"No."

"OK. See ya."

DON BOOKED A ROOM in a hotel on the corner of Fifth and Mission and then headed for Sixth Street. Sixth is a raunchy, shabby street which tips down gradually from Market towards the Bay. It has more than its share of pawn shops, crummy restaurants, crotch dens of the grimmer type, and further down a Porn Movie House brightens the rainy night with a thick cluster of yellow flashing lights. Don plodded along in his raincoat, his old fishing hat, and made his way between a drab assortment of whores, pimps, S&M Bikers, and an occasional rain-soaked hippy who belonged in another time and another place.

Don plodded down to the corner of Howard and Sixth and glanced across at a green van with pink polka dots freckled over its nose and tail. Its front seat was occupied by a thin, narrow black with a taut interested face. Don strolled past him and then swung out of the rain into a doorway to light a cigarette. A couple of minutes later the black ambled over. "You from out of town, huh? Want some action?"

Don stepped out of his doorway, and into the rain and stared into the man's eyes. The eyes closed.

The nostrils widened.

"I need a gun."

The eyes flared open with sudden perception. "You the Man, ain't ya? But you ain't from here. You from far away, Brother. Right?"

"Right."

As if his thin chin were something over which he had no direct control, the black's eyes seemed truly puzzled at the way it angled up the street towards the corner of Mission. "See that Dude in black leather. Tear a twenty in half. Walk up to him and shake his hand. He'll get what you want. Cost ya a C note."

Along towards Mission in a notch between a Pink Chrysler and a Lavender Olds, a blond tough leaned casually against a chrome and black Harley. Cold rain glistened on black leather, bulging biceps and sparkled like diamonds in scraggly blond hair and beard. If he was watching anything at all he was eyeing a thin, young blond girl in red slacks who was talking to a tall black pimp. Until Don reached out his right hand and held it towards him, the Biker seemed totally unaware.

The Biker kept his brown eyes glued on the whore, but Don found his own hand taken in a rather gentle grip, and his torn twenty was palmed with no visible fuss. "What is it, Brother? You needing some metal? Forty-five Army Automatic? Too heavy? OK, OK,

so it's a .38, then. See that big green sign across the street? That advertises the Flesh, Brother. As in the biblical Garden of Eden. But this Eve, Brother, she got more tricks than Mattel has toys. Pay no mind. Walk right on through. My man, he'll be there. Pay him!"

A sign, Flesh and Fantasy, was painted in garish, psychedelic colors. Don pulled aside a heavy green curtain and stepped inside. The Biker had cautioned him to say nothing until he got through and upstairs to the back office. Shrill giggles came from one blonde, one brunette, and there was a sudden flash of naked female flesh. Don edged past the two girls and down a narrow hallway. A narrow carpeted stairs, led him to a green door. He opened it.

"Come in, come in!"

The office was orange and black with a yellow desk. A heavy dude wearing a tight grey suit, a thin red tie, sat behind the desk and watched Don out of cold reptilian eyes. "Over there, in the john, taped under the tank."

Back in Chi, Don had worked over enough of these El Cheapo heavies to last him for a lifetime. He watched the man's dirty fingernails peel paint from the top of his scarred yellow desk. To Don there seemed nothing cautious about the man's flagrant disregard for law and order.

"How many do you run?"

"Huh?"

"Girls?"

"Twelve."

"What about some info?"

Don eased his wallet out of his hip pocket and thumbed a twenty. The man stopped clawing his paint and held his fingernails up to scrutinize them woman style.

"Such as?"

"Any soldiers in town? Out of Chi?"

"Maybe."

"Name?"

"Cost ya another century."

As if my magic, the bill vanished into a vest pocket. "There's been talk. Wilks. Link Wilks."

DON RETURNED to the murder site. The shoe shine stand displayed a pinup of Cheryl Tieg, three empty seats whose vinyl was black and worn and a row of heavy black iron shoe rests. It was almost halfway between Market and Mission. On Mission, across from the Chron Building, stood a block-long parking garage. On Market, at the foot of Powell, a huge concrete indentation led down to a Bart Station and went by the name of Halladie Plaza. Don looked at the Cable Car turn-around and winced. Anna-Maria whose love of Cable Cars was phenomenal had made him ride it a dozen times.

Heard from inside the five story warehouse, the rain hammered

the roof with a distant, hungry urgency. A piece of metal flapped loosely in the wind. Don held his breath and listened. There was no other noise. A thin wedge of light slid under the door in front of him. Don tried the knob, eased it open. A scent of hot metal and acrylic paint hit him in the face. The room was fully lighted. Cluttered work benches crowded the walls. A battalion of color TVs stood at attention and faced a corner office which was empty. There was a freight elevator in the back. Outside, a big old fashioned sign had read Furniture Repair, but the sign painter could have made a mistake.

Don shivered. He was soaking wet. After finding Link's rental car in the parking garage on Mission, Don had set up surveillance and when Link showed he had followed him down to a warehouse near China Basin. Link parked in a no parking zone and went in. Don saw nobody else. It had taken him a quarter of an hour to get around to the rear of the building and go up the fire escape to the roof and make an entry through the emergency door.

Finding nobody, Don took the stairs and descended floor by floor. Enough merchandise to stock several department stores filled the building. Don didn't examine it. He knew Link was there. But where? On the lowest

level, two panel trucks were parked in narrow loading slots and beyond them, against the wall, narrow stairs ascended to a metal door. The door was closed. To Don it seemed a logical place to look. He held his breath and listened. There was no sound anywhere. Carrying his .38 at the ready, Don climbed the stairs.

He got halfway up when a voice spoke behind him, and Don realized Link had been hiding in the back of one of the panel trucks.

"OK, Copper, drop it."

For a second, Don hesitated, but he knew it would do no good. He let the .38 slide from his hand, and then waited for a bullet. It didn't come. "Come on down, Copper. Easy like. We're going to take a ride in the Freight elevator."

Cold wet rainwater soaked Don's slacks and ran down his legs, and he knew he could do nothing but slowly back down the stairs. At the bottom, Link made him turn around. Link wore a black raincoat, blue jogging shoes, and a pair of stained denims. In his hand, Link held his trademark, a heavy Walther P38, but this time it didn't wear a silencer.

Link walked him to the elevator, pushed the button. The doors banged closed and the elevator climbed slowly to the fifth floor. Link waved him towards the corner office. It was square with red carpeting and heavy wood panels. "Belongs to the boss.

They run a million through here every three months. Now, tell me something, Copper, you didn't trust li'l ol' Billy Case, did you?"

"Why?"

"Just wondered. He sold me. He sold you. What do you expect from a maphrodite?"

"Why, Quick Sue?"

"Yeah, that! I knew it was a mistake hitting her. But Copper, I had to. She knew I was hanging around Halladie Plaza for some reason. She guessed. She braced me. And for a street wise cookie that wasn't too smart. But you, Copper. You made me right away, didn't you? That's why I had to find out your hotel. Not hard. Not after your appearance on Anna Maria's talk show. You and that babe! Hot little number, huh? Usually at that range I don't miss. But your back was to me. And as luck would have it, a man and his wife barged down the hall."

Don watched Link ease himself towards the grey steel desk which sat in the far corner of the room. Link's body flowed with the liquid grace of a jaguar. When he got to the desk, he eased himself down into a half sitting half standing position. His eyes were cold grey lights, his mouth a twisted pink line. His hair was black and curly with grey streaks in the sideburns. He had been Chi's number one hit man for more years than Don cared to think.

Outside, beyond the drawn

shade, rain came down with an increased violence, and a distant spotlight colored the yellow shade a cold green color which looked almost like blue-ice. Don brought his eyes slowly back to Link. "How much you making, this job?"

Link's laugh sounded like a hacksaw cutting through chrome pipes. "Twenty-five. My expenses have gone up. I can't Winter in the Carib, like I used to. Sad, Copper, sad!"

"You alone?"

Link's eyes flicked past Don to the open door. An acid levity played along his lips. "What's the matter, Copper? Brain gone lame? You know I only operate solo. Always have. Always will. Funny thing, Copper, how you kept dragging up-that Ken Maddox case. Tipped me off. Anna-Maria didn't need to know anything about that. Way I figured it, you'd forgotten that years ago. How come you remembered it?"

"Wanta know something? Something I've never told anybody off the force?" Don grinned tightly. "Old Man Randall yanked me off that case. Wouldn't let me work it. Somebody paid him, and I knew it wasn't you. It had to be somebody like Rick Gordon. Somebody big. But, Link, right from the beginning, I had you pinned for that hit. No mugger would have left Ken Maddox's gold wrist watch. You know what those Philippe Patek watches cost?"

"OK, so I know now. Or so I learned. But I figured his wallet was enough. And it wasn't a bullet, mind you . . ."

"Yeah," Don interrupted, "I know what it was, Link. I made a study. It was an Italian Chianti bottle wrapped in wicker. I never found it, but I can tell you exactly what it looked like. It caved his skull in. On Quick Sue you used an iron shoe rest. Not that the cops know that yet. But I do. Who's buying you this time? Local? Out of State?"

"Hah!" Link curled his thick pink lips. "Dude name of J.B. Johns, San Jose. Didn't like the way Anna-Maria started prying into his scene. She likes to take that Powell Street Cable Car. I could have nailed her last night, but you were on there with her. Way I figured was the next time she came off, I could pop her nicely. Lose myself in the crowd. How much did you tell the local fuzz?"

Don watched the heavy gun come up and level at his sternum. Link's eyes glazed over. "Come on, Copper. Talk! What did you tell them?"

"Nothing. What could I tell them? I am having them run a print check. Seemed a good idea at the time. If you hadn't grabbed my portfolio when you skidded and stumbled, I wouldn't even have thought of that. I didn't know she was dead. Get your jollies that

way, right?"

Link's face got tense and white. "Meaning?"

"You like to shoot women. Not many hit men do. But you get an extra little thrill out of it. Know what the Medics call people like you?"

A sudden silence came into Link's eyes, and he cocked his head to the side and seemed to listen to some far off sound. Rain lashed the window, and somewhere in the distance there was a siren. Don didn't think it had anything to do with him.

"Know something, Copper?" Link curled his lips back from his teeth. "There's a fast way. And there's a slow way. I kinda figured on being nice to you. Doing it neat. Real neat. Now, I'm not so sure."

"What's your total score?"

"Huh?"

"Women?"

Link's gun jerked up, came into alignment with Don's Adam's Apple. "You're not being smart, Copper. Ever see a guy with his throat shot off? They live quite awhile. If it's done right. And they can't talk. Not ever."

"Even your technique varies. Men, you shoot in the heart. Women, you shoot in the belly. What is it, Link? Trying to shoot your own mother? Maybe your own sister?"

Link laughed hoarsely, rawly. He edged in closer, rocked from side to side, and gyrated crazily

around Don. The glaze disappeared from his eyes. A thin layer of spit coated his lips. Link's breathing came in ragged raw gasps. One long black hair dangled from his left nostril. He had nicked his chin shaving, and Don could smell his sweat, his raw feral odor which was like that of a beast backed into a corner.

"Copper, you shouldn't talk like that. Link gets mad if people talk to him like that. Link loves his mother. Link . . ."

Right then, Link came into line with the yellow window shade, and Don ducked his head and charged. Link tried to step out of the way but couldn't. Don's head smashed into Link's diaphragm. Link gasped. His arms flailed. His legs scissored as he tried to regain his footing, but Don's rush carried him inexorably backwards. A bullet knocked a chunk of plaster out of the ceiling. Link lost his gun, howled angrily, and disappeared in a shower of broken glass. Don stared at the gun, reached down, picked it up. With the gun in his hand, he leaned out the window, looked down five floors and waited, but from below came no movement and no sound:

DON TURNED THE KEY, walked into his room. No lights were on, but the drapes were open and enough light came from the street to show him around. He had no sense or feeling of anything

being out of the way until he glanced at the chair by the window. Somebody was in it, somebody who sat quietly, without sound and waited. Don felt the quick icy chill in his throat.

"Yeah? What ya want?"

"You weren't nice to me, Mister! You got me all heated up. Then dumped me. Why?"

Her voice flowed at him like liquid gold. Hearing it in the dark like that without seeing her features, her eyes, her mouth, he could understand why thousands and thousands of TV viewers were sold on that voice. It vibrated with something out of the common, as if Anna-Maria had taken a million female voices and out of them had distilled the one true female voice. She spoke with the voice of Eve, but of an Eve who was aware and who knew.

"How'd you get in?"

"Slipped the lock. I learned a few things working the Crime Slot. Why did you dump me?"

"I don't remember it that way."

"I do."

All those hours without sleep had taken an immense toll. Don couldn't see straight. He had a weird feeling of looking at a triple exposure through vague primary colors. She sat up straight in his chair, face in shadow, and lit a cigarette. "What happened? Why'd you change your mind?"

Don stood silently, fingering

his torn raincoat, not even remembering how or when he had torn it, knowing he would have to buy another. Luckily, from the shattered glass when Link fell he had taken only one small cut.

"OK," he said softly, "better tell me why you came here."

Anna-Maria stubbed out her cigarette and stood up. She wore an expensive trench coat of dove grey, badly streaked by rain, and a small green beret. Her face was pale, without make-up. "Funny thing, until the old woman was killed, I didn't think much about it. I knew J.B. had hired somebody. But I got curious. And I kinda got a kick out of trying to find out who he was."

"And did you?" Don's throat went suddenly dry as if he were coming down with a raging attack of the flu.

Anna-Maria contorted her lips into a grim smile. "Being in the Media is not like real life. Sometimes you get to think like those images on the other side of the tube. It was easy enough to find out who he was. Where he came from. Easy! Until later, he didn't scare me. But tonight . . . I saw you leave. I saw you following him."

"When did you learn his name?"

"Not until this morning, or yesterday morning, when you mentioned it on the show. Seems to be the only thing you were ever sorry about. I mean, not nailing

him in Chicago."

She came to him, trembling, burning. She pushed him slowly towards the bed. Under her trench coat, she wore nothing, nothing at all. Don felt her excitement teasing warmth from each and every cell of his body, and this time he didn't and couldn't say no.

It was the look in her eyes which knocked some sense into him. She was looking over his shoulder at the door.

"What's the matter?"

"Do you always leave it open?"

A couple of hours later, the phone rang and Don carefully extricated his right arm from under a naked shoulder. He caught the phone on the second ring. It was Moats telling him Anna-Maria's work had gotten J.B. Johns indicted on a drug conspiracy charge. "Garrski, I got something else. We got a make on those prints. Link Wilks, out of Chi. An old friend of yours. By the way, he turned up dead a little while back. You weren't around, were you?"

"You kidding? Not me." Don glanced out the window at the rain and the cold green light which flowed from the traffic light at the intersection of Fifth and Mission. The ruffled head stirred slightly on the white pillow beside him, but she didn't wake up. Don kept staring at the green light, waiting for it to turn red, but it never did. ●

Looney Tune

by Terry Black

We were getting zapped right and left, and I couldn't figure out why. Then I got my first clue, and I knew one thing was for sure. The killer had me next on his list!

THEY FINALLY GOT old Porky.

I popped out of my hole and there he was, strung up over Elmer Fudd's carrot patch like an overstuffed scarecrow. Same old Porky — short and fat, with stumpy feet, blunt fingers, pointy ears and big silver-dollar eyes. But his legs were broken, his arms were trussed up with barbed wire and his head was twisted crazily sideways.

He looked over and saw me; he grunted, coughed, spat out a little blood and whispered, "A th-, a th-, a th-, a th-, a that's all, folks . . ."

Then he bought it.

I swore I'd get the filthy bastards who killed him if I had to tear up every kiddie show on the

boob tube to find them.

My name's Bugs. I'm an animated bunny rabbit. I'm also a private eye.

I ducked back into my rabbit-hole, poured a stiff two fingers of carrot wine and thought a while. Porky wasn't the first. First it was Daffy, blown to pieces by a couple of nutso duckhunters with bloodshot eyes and 12-gauge shotguns. They called it a hunting accident, but Jesus — two drunken hicks, blasting an old pro like Daffy? I don't think so . . .

Tweety-bird got it next. They found him in a coal mine; gas poisoning. Lots of canaries before him went the same way, but I don't buy it — Tweety was too smart to play life insurance

for some paranoid miners. I mean, you gotta be on your toes to stay ahead of the pudgy cats. Tweety was no fool.

But somebody outclassed him. And others, too.

Yosemite Sam caught it in a bordello. Some feline hussy straight out of *Fritz the Cat* stuck a knife in his ribs and did a fast fadeout before the cops arrived. Crime of passion? Maybe, but it fits the pattern too well. Besides, Sam had the moxie to stay clear of dames like that.

The one that floored me, though, was Road Runner. I swore they'd never get him. Wile E. Coyote's been trying for years; everything from landmines to superglue to Acme exploding birdseed — and the Runner never fell for it. They got him, though. Nothing funny, nothing fancy, nothing to keep the teeny-bopping jackoffs laughing on Saturday morning; just a sniper with a long-range rifle, here he comes, ka-BLAM! and a cartoon legend is a bloody dead thing by the side of the road.

We're getting zapped left and right, and I can't figure who's behind it or why, or what the hell's even going on anymore. Maybe Chuck Jones went schizo up there in Hollywoodland. Maybe some animated Mafia types are muscling into our cartoons and bumping off the local talent. Maybe one of the animators just turned sadist.

All maybes — not what a private eye gets paid for.

So I kicked around my options. Outside help? Not likely — all the really good heroes were out of commission, washed up. Superchicken was kidnapped by a purchasing agent for Colonel Sanders. George of the jungle was tied up in court, when Johnny Weissmuller sued him for cribbing the Tarzan yell. Dudley Do-Right was thrown out of the Mounties for seducing the Inspector's daughter.

And Underdog quit the trade when Wally Cox kicked off; without Cox for the voice-overs, he was just another mutt, and Sweet Polly Purebred left him and ran off with a talking hound dog from another studio.

So it was all up to me. But I was stuck; no witnesses, no murder weapons, no cryptic dying messages or tearful confessions or dazzling chains of deduction — just a growing list of cartoon corpses and a shrinking list of suspects.

Then I got my first lead.

"You're Bugs, right?"

I looked up. I don't know how many hours had passed; time sorta blurs after the third bottle of carrot wine. But I was sharp enough to recognize the long-tailed rodent floozy leaning over my desk.

Minnie Mouse.

Yeah, Minnie Mouse, Mickey's famous girlfriend, straight out of a hundred sentimental cartoons and

about a million comic books. But that was long ago. She was past her prime now; the curves were sagging, the lashes were drooping, the luster was gone from her high-heeled shoes. Her eyes were kinda puffy, like she'd been crying.

I waved her into a chair. "What's up, Doc? Spill it."

"A-All right." She fidgeted, fixed her dress, clenched her paws. "I'm scared, Bugs. Scared at what's happening over at Disney Studios. It's getting worse and worse and I don't know what to do . . ." She dabbed at her eyes with a Disneyland handkerchief.

I sighed. "Why don't we take it from the top?"

"Okay." She lifted the handkerchief and blew her snout. "I know it sounds crazy — but there's something wrong with Mickey, something I can't explain. Maybe it's his midlife crisis or male menopause, or maybe he went a little senile when he turned fifty. But something's really bugging him. He never takes me out on jungle safaris or airplane rides or steamboat races anymore; he just sits at Walt's old drawing board, nibbling a piece of Velveeta and drawing on a sketchpad."

I lifted a whisker. "What does he draw?"

"These." She groped in a pocket of her dress, pulled out half a dozen crumpled sheets and tossed them on my desk. "I'm

worried, Bugs. I think Mickey's mixed up in something he can't handle."

I didn't answer. There were six line drawings spread out in front of me, all scrawled on sketchpaper: Daffy, Tweety, Sam, the Runner, Porky — and me.

"Can you help him, Bugs?"

I shrugged. "I'll do what I can." I forced a smile, sent her home and pondered the case over a double carrot wine on the rocks. So Mickey was behind it all.

Damn that saucer-eared bastard, anyhow!

IT WASN'T LONG BEFORE Mickey's pals came after me. Within a week I dodged nine ticking baby carriages, got five ominous special delivery packages and found cyanide traces in twelve carrots. My rabbit hole was flooded with scalding-hot water; Fuddsy's carrot patch was filled with landmines.

I was a dead rabbit if I didn't act fast.

So that Sunday I dropped in on Walt's Wonderful World of Color, promptly at 7:00 (6:00 central time) and confronted the Mouse on his home ground. He was dressed in top hat and tails, leading Donald and Goofy in a song-and-dance routine when I stepped onstage.

"Bugs!" he squealed, startled at my appearance in the wrong timeslot. "What's the big idea . . .?"

"Stuff it, Mouse," I snapped. "I want some answers. What's the story behind the big cartoon rub-out? I don't like it when my buddies get the axe."

Mickey's eyes bulged. "Are you crazy? We're on the *tube* for Chrissakes! You can't just come bustin' in here and raving like a madman —"

"Who's raving? I got proof, Mouse. I can send you up the river for a long, long time."

Mickey snorted. "You're nuts, Flopears."

"Am I? Tell it to the Feds. Minnie gave me your illustrated hit list, complete with drawings of your first five victims and a dozen pawprints that match yours perfectly. I can nail you for murder one, Mouse." (Pure bluff — the boys downtown couldn't lift a thing off the crumpled pages, but Mickey didn't know that).

He watched me closely, forgetting the camera. "You really mean it, don't you?"

"Bet your ass I mean it. Come clean, Mickey — why'd you do it?"

The Mouse pulled off his top hat with a sad smile. "For ratings, Bugs. Ours are slipping. Oh, we're not getting canned or anything — but we're slipping. Too much competition around. What's so great about a couple of talking mice when you can have Jay Ward, or Hanna-Barbera, or Depatie-Freleng or Ralph Bakshi?

"But what if the other studios lost their headliners? What if there was no Woody Woodpecker, no Rocky and Bullwinkle, no Pink Panther or Fred Flintstone or Josie and the Pussycats? Why, we'd be on top again! The Disney mob would rule the airwaves! Nielsons would shoot up like weeds in an azalea patch. And Minnie and me would have it all, just like before . . ."

I shook my head. "Not Minnie. She'd never have gone along with it. You'd have lost her, just like you lost everything else when you started to break the rules. Tough luck, Mouse — you never had a chance."

"You didn't, either," said Mickey. He reached into his top hat and pulled out Tinkerbell's magic wand. "You shouldn't have come here, Bugs. This wand'll fricasee your butt faster than a dozen microwaves." Mickey snarled and drew up the wand, lips pulled back over gleaming rodent teeth, eyes shut tight in concentration —

And I brought out my secret weapon: a broomstick.

Then the spell was cast — a searing bolt of energy, like the blast from a Smith & Wesson. But it never came near me. Instead it struck the broomstick, and Mickey's eyes widened as he realized his mistake.

"God Almighty! Not the broomstick . . . !" Desperately

he grabbed an axe and smashed it to splinters, but each of the pieces came to life again — and all were carrying magical buckets of water, bearing down on Mickey, dousing him again and again until his colors ran and his shape dissolved and the clear, crisp lines of the world's favorite cartoon character were just a dull gray smudge on a moist piece of paper...

Only this time there was no sorcerer to save him.

LATER I TRIED TO RELAX.

It was over: Mickey was dead, his gang was on ice, the police had a dozen full confessions. And I had my health and my license

and a carrot wine cocktail in a dirty glass.

But I wasn't happy with the outcome. Twenty million viewers saw Mickey Mouse die; most of them were just kids. Now they've seen us, *really* seen us, and they know we're not just sugar-sweet candy-assed goodguys when the lights go down and the cameras click off. We screw around and get drunk and horny and pissed off just like grownups, and I don't think the kiddos will like it.

They'd better get used to it, though, because that's the way we really are. Including a tired bunny rabbit private eye named Bugs.

So long, folks. See you in the funny papers. ©

STRANGE, BUT TRUE

At long last, the mystery of what happened to Christopher Columbus has been solved. Famous historical scholar Antonio Vecchi recently unearthed papers written by one of the explorer's crewmen telling of the ill-fated 1492 voyage of the *Nina*, the *Pinta*, and the *Santa Maria*. According to Vecchi, the diary proves conclusively that the mutineers forced their captain to walk the plank into the Atlantic Ocean, where he was promptly devoured by sea serpents. The men then quickly turned the ships around before they could be sucked over the edge of the world.

"We all know that Columbus was a madman," Vecchi said, "and that he was leading his ships and crew to disaster. These newly-discovered papers show the extent of his madness. Even as the ships were approaching the rim, where they would have toppled over into space. Columbus was insisting the world was round. As any schoolboy knows, proof of the Earth's flatness was, once and for all, clearly demonstrated by Sir Isaac Newton in 1725, two years before he was accidentally killed during archery practice when the atomic warhead on his target arrow exploded prematurely."

ED NOON'S MINUTE MYSTERY

by Michael Avallone

Barney Tell of Tomlin's Three Ring Circus called me up just three days after the accident. The cops had been satisfied it was an accident when Vern Rowles fell to his death in the middle ring on Wednesday afternoon in the Garden. Vern had made circus headlines with his phenomenal stunt of balancing himself on a seventy-five-foot pole and doing handstands and hanging acrobatics without benefit of a net. But when the pole splintered right near the base and Vern Rowles dropped the 75 feet to the floor of the arena, the story made all the papers.

And now Barney Tell was calling up a private eye to go through the paces. I saw Tell in his office and he gave me the dope. Bad blood can kill any

circus show, and Barney had kept Tomlin's Three Ring together for 40 years. He offered me a grand to scout around the big tent and find out what really happened to Vern Rowles.

I took the money and went out into the gigantic playing area where a lot of the acts were rehearsing the afternoon performance. My first step was Ken Fremont who was putting his lions through their paces. Ken was a glib, burly guy in spangles and when I flashed my badge, he made no bones about his feelings for Rowles. The dead acrobat was a real stinker. Mean, for no good reason. Ken had caught him deviling his lions once with an overdose of pepper in their meat at feeding time. Fremont had knocked him down and didn't regret his death at all.

My next stop was Ben Argo, an elephant trainer, who backed up Fremont's story. Vern Rowles seemed to get some insane satisfaction in tormenting animals. He had once spread a load of hot coals in the sleeping quarters of Argo's star elephant, Tillie. Tillie had trumpeted around like mad until Argo watered her down. He, too, was glad that Rowles had got what was coming to him.

As I moved around the big arena questioning the roustabouts, I got the same story. Vern Rowles was a petty sadist and more than one of the acts had had trouble with him. Lila, the bareback rider, admitted she'd had a crush on him until she caught him cruelly tugging the bit in her horse's mouth.

Well, I'd heard enough by that time. Any one of a dozen people would have strangled him gladly. I went out to the big pole where the accident had happened. A new one towered up into the sky under the big top. But not far away, about two yards, I could see where the old one had been, because the jagged stump was still in the packed ground. I bent down to examine it.

The pole had obviously snapped near the base because the stump was about a foot high. The head of the stump was a mass of jagged, chewed wood so it was a cinch it hadn't been cut or anything like that. Weakened to the point where it splintered apart, but not cut.

I got up and dusted myself off. The pole had been painted white and the exposed part that remained had a huge scrape on it where the original color of the wood showed through. I was satisfied but when I got back to Barney Tell's office, I asked him for the worksheet roster. He looked puzzled but showed it to me anyway. I took a close look at it and found what I wanted. On the morning of the rehearsal, Ken Fremont's lions had worked in the same location with Ben Argo taking the spot after him with his pachyderms. Lila, the bareback rider, had used the next ring.

Barney Tell looked at me. "Find anything?" he asked.

I nodded and told him to forget the whole case. A man had been killed all right, but no jail in the country could convict the murderer.

THE SOLUTION

They say an elephant never forgets. And Tillie, Ben Argo's prize peanut eater, had remembered the hot coals. Only an elephant placing its big hoof against the base of the pole could have weakened it to the point where it might break during the performance. The paint scrape on the stump matched in size Tillie's hoof. I was sure the incident had had a dozen witnesses, but I was also sure that Vern Rowles had gotten exactly what was coming to him.

MIKE'S MAIL



Got something you'd like to tell Mike, the authors, the editor, the publisher, other readers? We'd like to hear from you. Brickbats are just as welcome as bouquets, though of course we'd rather have bouquets. If we're doing something you don't like, let us know. Maybe we'll change. (And maybe we won't!) Any suggestions for improvement? Any new columns you'd like? Anything you'd like taken out? After all, we put out this magazine for your entertainment, and we want to make sure you're getting your money's worth. Write!

CEF

NEW SUBSCRIBER

I am a new subscriber to MSMM. I want to congratulate you on your great stories, especially by Brett Halliday, Edward D. Hoch, W.L. Fieldhouse, etc. But there is a question I would like

to ask. What would you think of putting together a special MSMM containing all the Mike Shayne stories that appeared in your publication. This way all the new and old fans would have a fantastic collection of Mike Shayne stories, which will always come in handy. If there is such a book or other

publication in existence, please let me know how I can get my hands on it.

Michael Klein
Brooklyn, NY

MSMM has been around a long time, Michael, and if we put all the Shayne short novels in one book it would be bigger than a breadbox. If we fit two in each issue, it would take us ten years to cover them all. Your best bet is to get back issues. Use the back issue order form (or a photocopy) in this issue, telling us what you have, and we'll send you some you don't have.

PICKING A NIT

I really like the new look of the magazine. MYSTERY MAKERS, STIFF COMPETITION, and the readers' letters are all interesting and add to the magazine.

I trust you won't hold it against me if I pick one small nit? I really didn't care for the humorous STRANGE, BUT TRUE pieces in the April issue. Matter of taste, I guess.

Jack Petree
Bellingham, Washington

BETTER THAN TV?

I am neither fifty years old nor a female. I recently turned on to magazines like Mike Shayne and

Ellery Queen's because television in recent years has become a vast wasteland. Magazines, especially mystery magazines, to me anyway, provide per page more entertainment than an hour and a half of constant TV viewing. Also, reading mysteries saves money, energy, and you can't second-guess the plots like I can those boring so-called mystery TV shows.

Even though I consider Mike Shayne the best of the current mystery titles being published, I am still not satisfied with it. Yes, I like Mike Shayne, but I sure wish the magazine would feature more series than Mike Shayne and Major, Lansing. No, I am not asking you to become a carbon copy of EQMM; but a regular rotating schedule of backup features would be nice, especially if there were more backup stories devoted to a single character. See, I am not calling for Mike's disappearance from his own roost. I just want more series. Also, I would like to see the whole address printed underneath the letters printed in the letter column so that Mike Shayne fans can contact each other. I think if you did that it would help MSMM become the #1 mystery mag in the English speaking world.

Have you folks ever considered publishing another mystery magazine, perhaps spotlighting Ross McDonald's Lew Archer or Mickey

Spillane's Tiger Mann? How about bringing back Black Mask as a quarterly. This is my first letter to you folks, but it won't be my last.

Hec Rambla
712 West 176.St.
Apt. 5E

New York, NY 10033

P.S. How about reviving The Shadow Mystery Magazine. I think new stories of the Shadow would go good if done in a serious vein, or one on James Bond.

I'm afraid publishing another magazine is out of the question — for now, anyway. Blame inflation.

BLACK MASK FAN

Although I have only subscribed to MSMM for six months, I have enjoyed reading it for a couple of years and have been reading Mike Shayne novels for 25 years. John Ball's "Stiff Competition" and "Mike Shayne Mystery Makers" are very interesting, but the stories are still what MSMM is all about. I like especially the stories that are reminiscent of BLACK MASK authors Hammett, Chandler, Gruber and Gardner, et al, such as those by Fieldhouse. I also enjoy Hoch and Treat.

Gerald Fox
San Diego, CA

PRIVATE EYE MAN

I was wondering if you would consider getting stories of Edward Breeze's *Johnny Hawk*, Michael Avallone's *Ed Noon*, and Edward D. Hoch's *Nick Velvet*.

Also, would you consider a section covering news concerning anything having to do with mystery writers, awards given to same, and the latest news pertaining to the subject.

There are too few good, thrilling, - fast-paced mystery/suspense series novels left on the market. It seems like they are a dying breed, and that saddens me greatly.

John R. Baker
N. Charleston, SC

The idea of using news items has occurred to me, John, but I'm afraid it would be impractical. We have to get the material for each issue to the printer months before you see it, so there's no possibility of presenting you with the latest news. If there are any items that are not timely but are of interest, I'll be happy to pass them along. Meanwhile, there's an article in the works which will cover the sources where mystery fans can get news, and we'll be printing it in an upcoming issue.

You've probably noticed that Michael Avallone's ever-popular

Ed Noon is back with us in a series of MINUTE MYSTERIES. That should cheer you up somewhat. Private eye series novels have diminished in popularity, and it doesn't pay — literally — to write them. But these things run in cycles and who knows — maybe in a few years . . . So stick around.

hope so. At any rate, I love your books and I'm not easy to please.

Linda Vaughn
Mulkeytown, ILL

P.S. Right now I'm reading your April issue, and I love it.

REMOVE THE SHORTS!

As a regular reader and subscriber, I have only one remark to make toward the improvement of this magazine and that is, keep away from these one or two page stories. They add nothing to the magazine. I would be glad to pay a little more for the magazine.

B. Brandt
Gross Point, Mich.

WAKE UP THE POORFREADER!

More and more lately we are finding misplaced paragraphs which make the story hard to follow. Please find your proof-reader (wherever he sleeps) and put him on bread and water until it's right.

We do enjoy the STRANGE, BUT TRUE stories and are looking forward to more MINUTE MYSTERIES to solve.

As the saying goes: "Thanks for the mysteries."

SHE LOVES US!

"Thank you for MSMM. I have been a mystery reader all my life, but there are only certain ones I like. Mike Shayne is my #1 detective. There is only one other man that comes close to Mike, and that's Major Lansing.

I loved DEATH ON THE STRIP. Now you have STRANGE, BUT TRUE, and it's great.

I love the idea of Mike telling his own story, and maybe Major Lansing could do the same. I sure

Rai Petula
Ketchikan, Alaska

Believe me, Rai, the problem of misplaced paragraphs grieves me more than it does you. There was a special problem with the April issue. We had a new employee (mercifully no longer with us) who perpetrated some last minute goofs when we were also trying to increase the number of pages in MSMM for a couple of issues before inflation destroyed the dream. It's not a matter of

proofreading but errors in paste up, which is something like working a jigsaw puzzle with all the pieces lying face down. Even an efficient person can sometimes go awry, but when we inadvertently get one who isn't, it becomes an editorial nightmare. Which is why, starting with the September issue we're going to use one column widths, which will significantly cut down (hopefully even eliminate) continuity errors.

NO MORE SERIALS

About DEATH ON THE STRIP, it read like a Mike Shayne story with the names changed. A month is too long to wait to finish a story. If your magazine came out twice a month it would be O.K. Three times a month would be even better. Weekly would be the best. For serials, that is. But at \$1.50 a shot it will have to be monthly. And NO serials.

How about an ANNUAL ISSUE? With new stories, by the most popular authors of the previous year.

How about some fantasy or horror stories? Or some gaslight stories from the turn of the century?

Your magazine is very good. Keep up the good work.

George Stevens
Summit, New York

MAKING SENSE

I had to write to tell you the Mike Shayne stories are the best in your magazine.

I also want to say to Margaret B. Maron to keep a mystery a mystery. You'd be amazed at the people resorting to used book stores in order to get a decent mystery.

Please don't downgrade your magazine by publishing stories that make no sense as others have.

J.A.W.
Flint, Michigan

P.S. W.L. Fieldhouse's Major Lansing stories are great.

DON'T CHANGE

Enclosed find money order for renewal of my subscription of MSMM for another year. I must say after reading your stories for twelve years, I find that the calibre of your novels has reached its peak and far passed the writings of Hitchcock Mystery Magazine. Please do not change your format as suggested in a letter to you. I would miss the Mike Shayne story at the beginning and be very unhappy about it. Just keep as great as you are. Thank you. I enjoy your stories very much.

Helen Louison
Patchogue, NY

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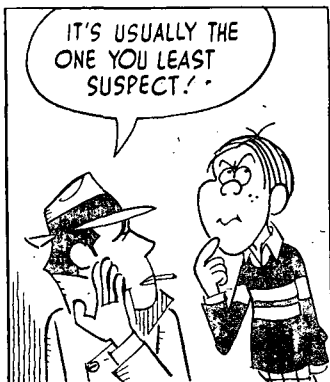
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MIKE SHAMUS

by FRED FREDERICKS



STIFF COMPETITION

BOOK REVIEWS

by John Ball

All mystery/suspense fiction breaks down into thirteen basic categories, each of which has its practitioners and followers. They are: classic puzzle, private eye, gothic, police/procedural, amateur sleuth, occult, espionage, caper, pure suspense, comedy, inverted story, solo virtuoso (Charlie Chan), and the courtroom drama. Of these the private eye is one of the most popular.

Private eye fans will be delighted to know that Boston operator Spenser is back in *Looking for Rachel Wallace* by Robert B. Parker. Miss Wallace is an ardent feminist and a lesbian to boot, so her popularity in some quarters is limited. While she is on a promotional lecture tour, Spenser is engaged to guard her. Abhorring the idea that a man must

protect her, Rachel fires her bodyguard and is shortly thereafter kidnapped. The outcome does not create any great surprise, but good action, crisp dialogue, and a real personality conflict keep the pages turning. This work has to be rated close to tops in the private eye category. (Delacorte, \$8.95)

☆ ☆ ☆

After you read this one, you might enjoy private eye Angel Graham (a man) in Richard Russell's *Reunion* and *Point of Reference*. Available from Belmont at a modest \$1.50 each. Another private eye recently available in paperback is Casey Carmichael who appears in John Nicholas Datesh's *The Janus Murder*. (Leisure Books, \$1.75)

☆ ☆ ☆

In *The Attending Physician* R.B. Dominic (the same two ladies who write as Emma Lathen) uses a murder investigation to launch a savage attack on gross Medicare fraud by a group of physicians in a small Ohio city. The whole fabric of present day medical care comes under attack as well as the strict confidentiality of medical records. When a congressional subcommittee looks into the matter, it is discovered that one doctor has billed HEW for three hysterectomies on the same patient. Malpractice insurance practices are also examined as the accused doctors come under increasing pressure despite their positions of wealth and influence in their community. Well written and exciting at times, but the AMA is sure to take dim view. A crusading book that may attract considerable notice. (Harper and Row, \$8.95)

☆ ☆ ☆

Stephen Hunter has written an ambitious novel in *The Master Sniper*, which is well researched and moves along at a fast pace. Unfortunately, it is *The Day of the Jackal* revisited in many respects with a few different plot twists. As World War II reaches its end, a desperate project is undertaken by a secret German unit to kill one specific individual with a

newly-developed night scope. The progress of the plotting, and counter plotting is very well done, but at the end the author introduces two persons who have never before appeared, and whose existence is unknown, to resolve the matter. Also the hair's-breadth timing at the finish is unfortunately overdone. The author is definitely talented and we look forward to his next. (Morrow, \$10.95)

☆ ☆ ☆

Isaac Asimov has given us some more delightful short stories about the Black Widowers and their monthly meetings to discuss crime and other puzzles. As usual, in all twelve cases Henry the waiter, who is a member of the club, comes up with the solutions. While this is a variation on the well-known Jeeves theme that Wodehouse rode to fame, it is different enough to be fun. *The Casebook of the Black Widowers* is from the Doubleday Crime Club, \$7.95.

☆ ☆ ☆

It would be highly improper to say anything whatever about the possible merits of *Then Came Violence* by one John Ball. Sufficient to say that Mr. Virgil Tibbs, the cool black detective of the Pasadena Police Department, is back on the job, this time on a very delicate assignment of inter-

national importance. And he does meet a most remarkable lady. The rest you will have to decide for yourself. (Doubleday Crime Club, \$8.95)

☆ ☆ ☆

Two thirds of the way through *Eastwind Westwind* by James J. Nordhoff we had the feeling that we were making a major discovery in the espionage field. A supply of German World War II poison gas has fallen into private hands through a highly intricate process; tracing this out provides a complicated, but engrossing story. There is a threat to use the gas, of course; and the government is under blackmail. However, in a reach for additional sensationalism at the very end, the author employs a device that misfires badly and ruins an otherwise remarkable debut. With a better, and more believable ending, this could have been a strong candidate for the Edgar Award. (Morrow, \$11.95)

☆ ☆ ☆

In the amateur sleuth category Thackeray Phin takes on a fake medium and her devoted household in John Sladek's *Black Aura*. The result is a pleasant entertainment, particularly if you overlook the fact that a certain falling body lands in the wrong place. Phin might be regarded as a dis-

tant cousin of Edmund Crispin's Gervase Fen, but he is not yet quite in that class. The same publisher, incidentally, is reprinting the whole Crispin series, not a single one of which is to be missed. (Walker, \$8.95)

☆ ☆ ☆

In *Kill Claudio* by P.M. Hubbard a former mercenary finds his best friend killed and sets out, at the instigation of the widow, to settle the score. There is a great deal of telling rather than showing in this book, something that Hubbard is clearly skilled enough to avoid. Also, we must report that there is a great build up toward a major revelation that never comes. This will frustrate many readers who are entitled to have the secret revealed at the end. The setting is exceptionally effective, the details carefully done, but what was in that long hidden box? (Doubleday Crime Club, \$7.95)

☆ ☆ ☆

If you haven't yet read *The Murder of My Aunt* by Richard Hull, you will be glad to know that it has just been reprinted by International Polygonics, Ltd. This noted classic is discussed in Howard Haycraft's *Murder For Pleasure*, an indispensable guide that has been reprinted by Biblio and Tannen. ●

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(a quiz)

See if you can match the fictional characters in the left column with the actors in the right column who played them.

- | | |
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| 15. PHILIP MARLOWE | O. ROBERT TAYLOR |

ANSWERS:

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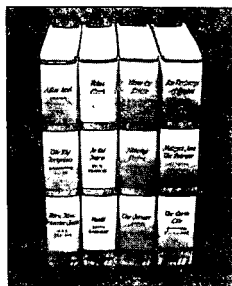
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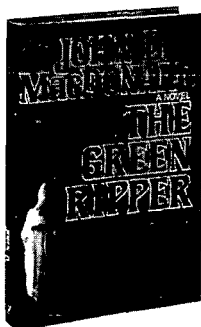
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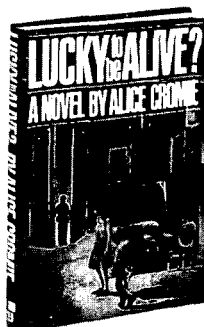
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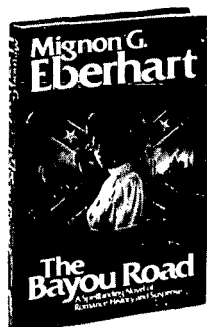
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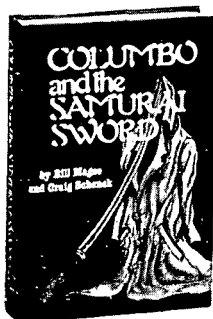
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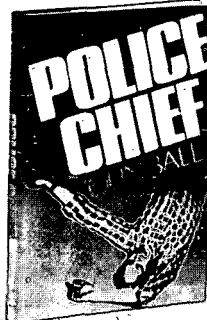
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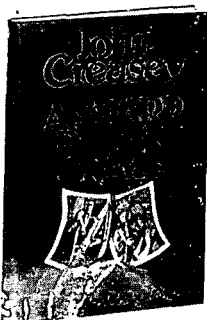
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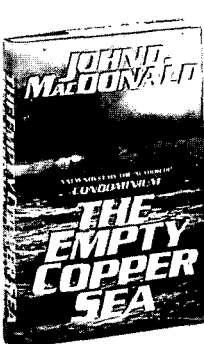
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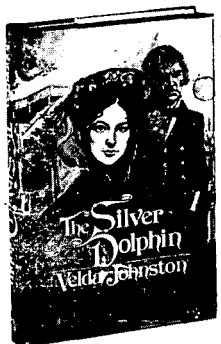
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